

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

October
2010

ANIMATION MAGAZINE™



Fall TV
Preview
Issue

Alpha and
Omega's
Puppy Love

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**Legend of the
Guardians:
Zack Snyder's
Heroic Owls
Take Flight**





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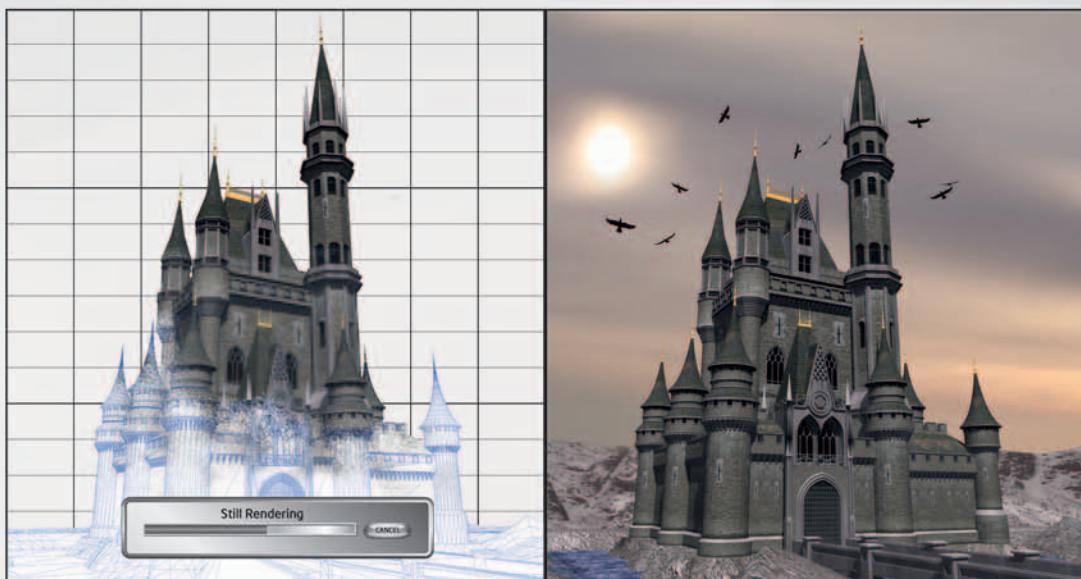
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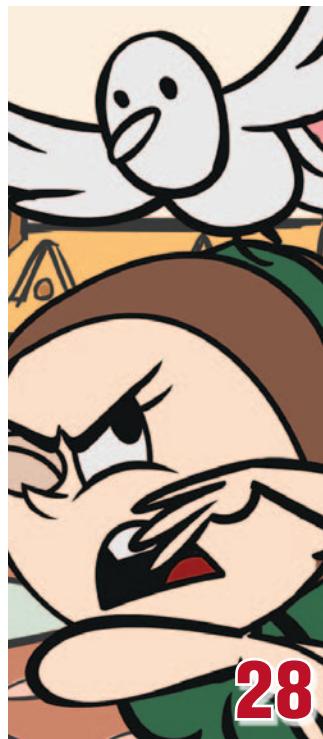


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Click With Animag Online Every Day!

Visit Animag's popular website (www.animationmagazine.net) every day for your daily dose of toon news and the chance to win the *Beauty and the Beast: Diamond Edition* 3-Disc Blu-ray/DVD Combo (available for purchase on Oct. 5) [courtesy of Disney].



Cover: Warner Bros.' *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole*.
MIP Junior Cover: Breakthrough Entertainment's *My Big Big Friend*.
Brand Licensing Cover: Mondo TV's *Puppy in My Pocket*.



It's been a sad month for those of us who loved the wonderful work of the late Japanese director Satoshi Kon. While the animation community is mourning the loss of this brilliant artist, there's also a great sense of loss about the many more movies he would have been able to make had he not died of pancreatic cancer on August 24.

Like many of his other fans, I learned about his spectacular imagination and unique vision around 12 years ago when his first feature

Perfect Blue hit the big screen. This Hitchcockian thriller centers on a pop idol who is trying to make it as an actress and is being stalked by an obsessive fan. But nothing is what it seems, and the director does an excellent job of blurring the line between fantasy and reality in this wonderful debut feature.

His second feature, *Millennium Actress*, offered a beautiful homage to a fictitious movie star who worked with the biggest Japanese directors of her time (think Ozu and Kurosawa). With *Tokyo Godfathers*, he told the poignant tale of three homeless characters—a drag queen, a young runaway girl and an alcoholic—who find an abandoned baby on a cold Christmas Eve and decide to track down her parents.

Kon loved to explore the human subconscious and to play with our notions of reality and dreams. In fact, all summer long, the Internet was buzzing with how much Chris Nolan's *Inception* owed its premise to the director's imaginative and haunting 2006 feature *Paprika*. Kon's 13-part TV series *Paranoia Agent* also offered much to ponder about the human mind and the role of the media.

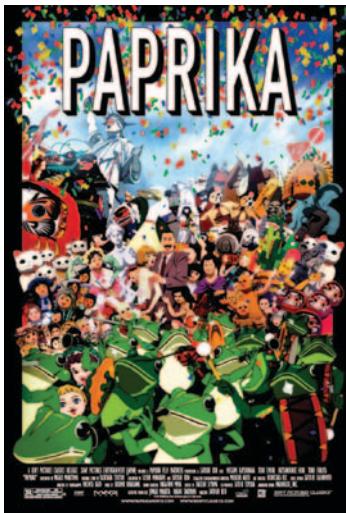
At the time of his death, Kon was working on a new movie titled *The Dreaming Machine*, which he had described as "a road movie for robots." It was heartbreaking to read what this talented man had posted on his website during his last living days. He thanked

his family, his friends, everyone he had worked with and all his fans. He also expressed much sadness about not being able to finish his final movie.

He wrote, "I am really sorry to all of the staff. However, I want them to understand, if only a little bit. Satoshi Kon was that kind of guy, and, that's why he was able to make rather weird anime that was a bit different ... So, to everyone who stuck with me through this long document, thank you. With my heart full of

gratitude for everything good in the world, I'll put down my pen. Now excuse me, I have to go."

Thank you for being that kind of guy, Mr. Kon.



Satoshi Kon (1963-2010)



The Dreaming Machine

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Stories
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in the
Oregon
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LAIKA

The Animation Planner

October

<p>1 <i>Let Me In</i>, the American version of the acclaimed European little vampire girl movie, opens wide in theaters today. We have our fingers crossed!</p> 	<p>2-3 MIPJunior brings children's TV professionals to the Carlton hotel in Cannes. Michael Poryes (co-creator of <i>Hannah Montana</i>) is the keynote speaker this year. (www.mipworld.com/en/mipjunior)</p> <p>mipjunior</p>	<p>4-8 mipcom The granddaddy of all TV markets is happening this week at the Cannes Palais des Festivals. It may not be as glam as the Cannes Film Festival, but you'll be able to meet a lot of important execs from the global toon world in one place. Lionsgate CEO Jon Feltheimer is the keynote speaker. (www.mipcom.com)</p>	<p>5 It must be some sort of national awesome animated DVD holiday today because we have Disney's <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> (Three-Disc Diamond Edition DVD/Blu-ray Combo) and the Oscar-nominated <i>The Secret of Kells</i> arriving in stores together. Other new items include <i>Phineas and Ferb: A Very Perry Christmas</i>, <i>Dr. Who: Dreamland</i>, <i>Ben 10 Alien Force Vol. 9</i> and the <i>Peanuts Holiday Collection</i> Blu-ray package. Wowee!</p> 
<p>8-10 NEW YORK COMIC CON No, this is not some sort of <i>Inception</i>-inspired dream scenario: The New York Comic-Con and the New York Anime Festival both take place at the same time at the Jacob K. Javits Center this weekend. (www.nycomiccon.com)</p> 	<p>12 Too many choices, too little time. The avalanche of releases today includes <i>Dexter's Laboratory: Season One</i>, <i>Wolverine and the X-Men: The Complete Series</i> Blu-Ray, <i>The Original Christmas Classics Gift Set</i>, <i>The Essential Bugs Bunny</i> DVD, <i>The He-Man and She-Ra Christmas Special</i> and <i>Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer</i> on Blu-ray.</p>		<p>15 Johnny Knoxville, Steve-O and the company do more crazy stunts and inflict pain on their bodies in <i>Jackass 3-D</i>. Bruce Willis, Helen Mirren and Morgan Freeman play former black-ops agents in this adaptation of the graphic novel <i>RED</i>, directed by Robert Schwentke. In toon news, DreamWorks' <i>How to Train Your Dragon</i> soars to DVD and Blu-ray today.</p> 
<p>16-17 The Alternative Press Expo is happening this weekend at the Concourse Exhibition Center in San Francisco. (www.comic-con.org/ape)</p> 	<p>19 Get your daily comedy dose with <i>Shaun the Sheep: Season One</i>, or some sweet sci-fi action with <i>Generator Rex, Vol. 1</i>, out today.</p> 		<p>20-24 Sylvain Chomet's <i>The Illusionist</i> is only one of the acclaimed gems screening at this year's Ottawa International Animation Festival. (www.animationfestival.ca)</p> 
<p>22-31 You can catch over 250 of the best films and videos made for children from over 40 countries at the annual Chicago Int'l Children's Film Festival. (www.cicff.org)</p> 	<p>26 Clones are everywhere on DVD today! Grab <i>Star Wars: The Clone Wars - The Complete Season Two</i> or count Hank and Dean's reincarnations in <i>The Venture Bros.: Season 4, Vol. 1</i>.</p> 	<p>26-29 The VIEW Conference in Turin, Italy, zeroes in on computer graphics, animation, 3-D and new technologies. DreamWorks' Tim Johnson (<i>How to Train Your Dragon</i>) is the keynote speaker. (www.viewconference.it)</p> 	<p>29 Wes Craven's <i>My Soul to Take</i> and Tod Williams' <i>Paranormal Activity 2</i> (Oct. 22) will both be trying to scare the living daylight out of moviegoers, just in time for Halloween.</p> 

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.

Books We Love



Animated Performance: Bringing Imaginary Animal, Human and Fantasy Characters to Life

By Nancy Beiman

[Ava Publishing, \$49.95]



Do we need another book on how to bring animated characters to life? After poring over Beiman's wonderful new primer, I can easily say that the answer is a resounding "Yes." The author, who is a well-respected animator and a professor at Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advance Learning in Canada, has delivered a beautiful 234-page instructional text that should inspire both beginners and longtime experts in animation. Packed with amusing illustrations, inspiring anecdotes and lively examples, Beiman's book acts as the kind of teacher we all wish we had in school. Covering topics such as portraying animal qualities in human characters, staging and composition, and the ages of man and woman, Beiman also sprinkles words of wisdom from renowned animation figures such as Goofy's animator and director Art Babbitt, who tells the author, "The medium of animation is not meant to simulate live action... See, animation, first of all, is not earth-bound... You can do things that are not possible in live action. And if you don't use the strength that exists in animation, then why bother with it?" Instances like that make us wish everybody working in animation today would browse through Beiman's book during their lunch break.

Tale as Old as Time: The Art and Making of *Beauty and the Beast*

By Charles Solomon

[Disney Editions, \$40]

Fans were disappointed to hear that Disney has shelved plans to release the 3-D version of *Beauty and the Beast* in the near future, but they can rejoice in the fact that Charles Solomon's excellent book about the making of the movie is now available for purchase online and in stores. This richly illustrated book offers readers a chance to learn about the history of the project, which goes all the way back to the late 1930s. *Tale as Old as Time* includes insightful interviews with directors Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale, story supervisor Roger Allers, producer Don Hahn, composer Alan Menken, art director Brian McEntee and many of the key creatives who realized this magnificent adaptation of the 18th century French fairy tale. Solomon, a well-respected animation historian and critic who has written numerous books on animation, brings his usual keen sense of history and critical analysis to the subject. He is the perfect, knowledgeable guide on this memorable journey. Let's just hope the powers that be decide on a release date for the 3-D version. After all, just think how great it would be to watch that famous dance number between Belle and the Beast in stereoscopic 3-D.

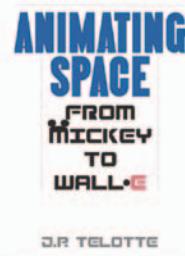


Animating Space: From Mickey to WALL•E

By J.P.Telotte

[The University Press of Kentucky, \$40]

If you're looking for a well-researched, scholarly look at the influence of animation in the modern era, you should look no further than J. P. Telotte's recent tome. Telotte, who teaches literature, communication and culture at the Georgia Institute of Technology, begins his book with a look back at the early days of animation, from Winsor McCay's Gertie the dinosaur and Mickey Mouse to the 21st century magic of Pixar. The author explores the relationship between modernism and animation and describes its influences on other arenas such as architecture, painting and expressionist film. While the book is a collection of brainy essays on how the art form has colored our experiences, we wish it included more interviews with those who create animation for a living.

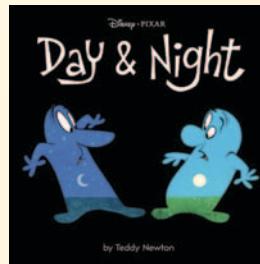


Day & Night

By Teddy Newton

[Chronicle Books, \$14.99]

For many of us, one of the best movie-going experiences of this summer was Teddy Newton's innovative, timely and all-around enjoyable 3-D short that accompanied Pixar's *Toy Story 3* in theaters. Not only did the longtime Pixar animator's four-minute-long short blend 3-D technology with 2D animation in a most creative way, it also said volumes about celebrating our differences and bridging the gaps between us in a few brief minutes on the screen. This handsome 40-page hardcover lets you relive the short's magic until you can find it on the *TS3* DVD/Blu-ray package later this year. It's the kind of item that will also make a great holiday gift or a birthday present for the cool people in your life! ■



—Ramin Zahed



A REAL HOOT!

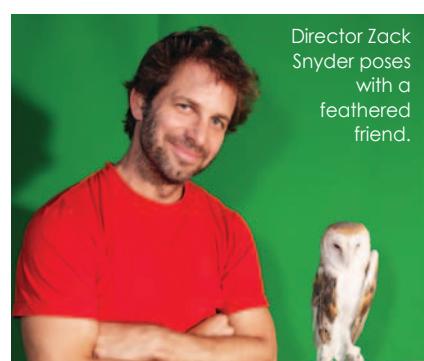
Director Zack Snyder leaves his live-action soldiers and superheroes behind to tackle a sweeping 3-D animated adaptation of *Legend of the Guardians*, featuring a brave parliament of owls. by Ramin Zahed

Although the name of the movie *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole* may not exactly roll off the tongue, one look at the striking 3-D animation is enough to convince audiences that this late-summer movie is going to be one heck of a ride. Based on the first three *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* books by Kathryn Lasky, the film is directed by none other than Zack Snyder, who is admired by legions of fanboys around the world for helming visually arresting films such as *300* and *Watchmen*. The CG-animated epic centers on a young owl named Soren (voiced by Jim Sturgess) who dreams of leaving his home and joining a mythic band of winged warriors in their fight against the evil Pure Ones.

Snyder says he and his wife Deborah (who is one of the pic's exec producers) originally got involved with the project after Australian animation studio Animal Logic blew him away with some initial paintings of the book's lead

characters. "After seeing their wonderful presentation, I thought, this is cool," recalls the director. "This is something I would be interested in. So then I did the research and read the books, and I loved the way the whole owl kingdom was constructed. I'm a huge fan of adventure movies, and thought that the books were in the vein of *Lord of the Rings* or *Chronicles of Narnia*."

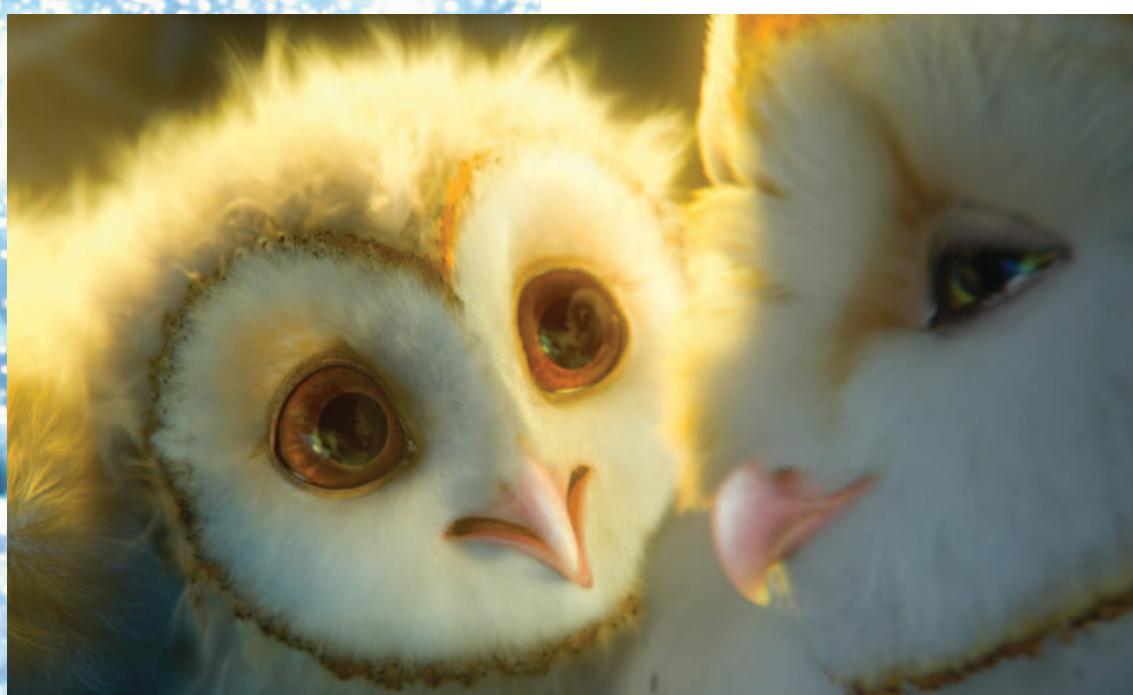
Snyder and his team started out with the script for the project, which was penned by John Orloff and Emil Stern. With the help of the experienced team at Animal Logic, which animated the Oscar-winning *Happy Feet* and is also working on the 2005 film's 3-D sequel, they figured out how to rig the Legend's cast of feathered warriors. "We went through all the stages of storyboarding the scenes, layout, animation clean up and lighting," says the helmer. "It was all a lot of fun for me because this was my first fully animated CG movie. We treated the owls as if they were six feet tall, it wasn't like we were



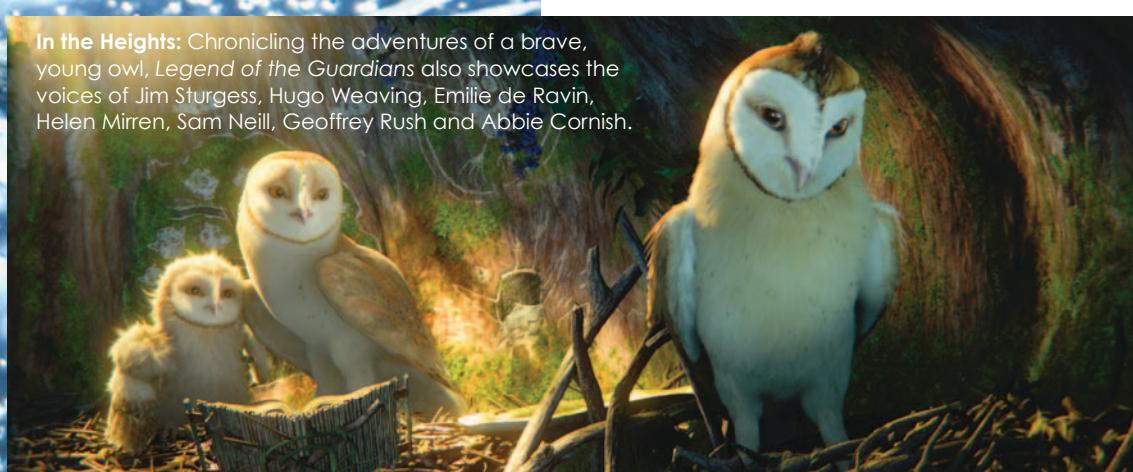
Director Zack Snyder poses with a feathered friend.

shooting miniatures. We built the digital assets and shot the film as if we were working on a real location. We really wanted to emphasize the organic nature of this world and that really influenced the way we realized the movie."

Writer John Orloff says Snyder was a wonderful choice to lead this adventure. "Zack instantly brought a visual aesthetic that has never been seen in an 'animated' film,"



In the Heights: Chronicling the adventures of a brave, young owl, *Legend of the Guardians* also showcases the voices of Jim Sturgess, Hugo Weaving, Emilie de Ravin, Helen Mirren, Sam Neill, Geoffrey Rush and Abbie Cornish.



he notes. "He didn't conceive the film as 'animated' in the sense of over the top stylized worlds or characters. Visually, it's all grounded in reality and I think Zack brought a depth of field, a three dimensionality of the frame—not just 3-D as a gimmick, but I mean three dimensions within the frame - camera moves, racking of focus, speed changes, etc."

Since Snyder has worked with the animation and vfx team at Animal Logic since 300, he has developed a certain short-hand with animation director Eric Leighton and art director Grant Freckleton, which makes the process much easier. He says the biggest challenge of working on an animated project is that somehow there always seems to be more adjustments and fine-tuning involved. "Because it's not a photographed film and you're constantly looking at rough animation, everyone is constantly viewing it as an unfinished project," he explains. "It opens it up to everyone wanting

to make more changes to the movie, and I normally don't work like that in live action."

Animal Logic's Leighton says the story was being adjusted in major ways right up to the end of animation. "The biggest challenge we had by far was to try to maintain the consistent integrity of our characters' performances in the face of these ongoing modifications to the edit and dialogue. Fortunately, we were blessed with an amazingly professional and talented international animal crew that relished the task," he notes. "Our team was more than willing to shoot from the hip and adapt to story changes, while maintaining a completely dedicated belief in their acting, which always kept their work fresh and energized on the screen."

Working on Animal Logic's previous big animated feature *Happy Feet* also helped the team prepare for some of the massive challenges of *Guardians* says Freckleton. "From the beginning we wanted a visually complex

world that built upon what we had learnt on *Happy Feet*," he recalls. "We wanted long feathered, intricately patterned owls instead of tightly feathered black and white penguins. We wanted dense forests instead of icebergs. We wanted engaging performances from creatures that are far less anthropomorphic and far more anatomically complex than penguins. Penguins don't need to fold their wings! There were five or six different penguin species in *Happy Feet*, *Guardians* has something like 15 different owl species, not to mention a snake, an echidna, a Tasmanian Devil and a handful of smaller mammals and birds ... Sometimes the problems were vast and highly technical, like creating a CG feathering system from scratch. Sometimes they were small and trivial, like figuring out how dirty a character's feet should be. Everyone on the crew contributed to the problem solving process and as each problem was solved, we would get a little closer to a finished film."



Epic Landscapes: Zack Snyder and the talented animators of Australia's Animal Logic (who also worked on the Oscar-winning *Happy Feet*) went the extra mile to make the stereoscopic images accentuate the owls' eye-popping adventures.

Animation, however, also provided Snyder a wider palette and a larger scope. "I love to draw and I always thought it would be interesting to make a fully CG animated work come to life," he adds. "I also love adventure films and wanted to make a classic adventure tale in the Campbellian sense of the word."

By Campbellian, the director is referring to the teachings of Joseph Campbell, the much-admired author whose theories of storytelling and his book *The Power of Myth* have been widely used and emulated in Hollywood, especially by pop cinematic visionaries like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. In a typical Campbellian tale, a young hero or heroine goes on a "hero's journey" and is often aided by an older, wise man or woman who offers guidance and wisdom to the protagonist.

Orloff also mentions that he instantly fell in love with the characters when he read the book. "So much fantasy is often derivative of Tolkien, but this world was totally unique. The first time you see the talking owls in the movie is pretty amazing. They don't look like cartoon owls—they're almost photo-real. Then, it just gets more and more visually arresting with each passing scene, thanks to Zack and Animal Logic."

Adventures in the Third Dimension

Of course, if you're making a CG-animated studio movie for audiences in 2010, you have to keep in mind that everyone expects the technical aspects of the project to be top-notch. Snyder says he was fully aware of all these expectations, especially when it comes to creating a stereoscopic 3-D world. "I feel like we really pushed the 3-D envelope everywhere," he says. "I cut my teeth on 3-D here. You have to go through it shot by shot and because you're putting the animals in the places that you want them, you can explore the results of the 3-D and change it if you don't like it. The goal is to stay organic in terms of cinematic language, but you want to explore the possibilities of the medium as much as you can. That's what they did with *Avatar*. You also have to be careful not to distract the audience with the 3-D—you don't want it to tell you how to shoot the movie."

The owls of *Ga'Hoole* may also have taught the director a few tricks that he will be taking

with him to his next two live-action features, 2011's *Sucker Punch* and the *300* sequel, *Xerxes*. Snyder says audiences can expect to see a lot more CG-animated characters in the sequel.

It's also quite refreshing to hear the director talk about the influence of classic animation on his body of work. "I used to watch all the classic Saturday morning cartoons, *Bugs Bunny* and *The Road Runner*," he says. "I am also a fan of anime—shows like *Star Blazers* and movies like *Appleseed* and *Akira*. Right now there is truly a large number of wonderful material out there for the whole family to enjoy together. It's possible to provide families with these timeless splendors that can inspire kids' imaginations and help them learn and grow—and keep them entertained with a great adventure story." ■

Warner Bros. releases *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole* in theaters nationwide September 24.



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Call of the Wild

Alpha and Omega, the new 3-D CG-animated pic from Crest Animation and Lionsgate, charts the unlikely friendship between two very different kinds of wolves.

You've seen the dynamic before: The tough-as-nails guy from the wrong side of the tracks gets involved with the uptown girl, and they fight and bicker all the way until the very end of the movie when they kind of realize they were made for each other. This time around, though, the story unfolds in a CG-animated world and the characters are a couple of young wolves (voiced by Hayden Panettiere and Justin Long) captured by park rangers and thrown together by unexpected circumstances.

The plot belongs to the movie *Alpha and Omega*, the first joint venture of Indian studio Crest Animation and U.S. indie studio Lionsgate, which hits theaters this month. Produced by animation veteran Richard Rich (*The Fox and the Hound*, *The Black Cauldron*) and directed by Ben Gluck (*Brother Bear 2*) and Anthony Bell (*The Sissy Duckling*, *The Boondocks*), the pic belongs to the new breed of indie projects that compete with the majors for the attention of family audiences.

Gluck says what drew him to the project was the source material. "I really

connected with the movie's themes," he explains. "I liked the fact that it dealt with family and love and breaking down the barriers between the characters. I also loved the fact that the project was a movie about wolves, which was great for me, because I had worked on a few animal movies in the past." In addition to directing *Brother Bear 2*, Gluck has worked on a variety of animated flicks in various capacities, including head of story for 9, head of story and writer on *Piglet's Big Movie* and story artist on *Home on the Range*. He says although the two-year process of making the movie was a bit challenging at times, he enjoyed working with the team at Mumbai-based Crest Animation to polish the 3-D animation and bring the wolves' world to life.

"We worked with the original script by comic-strip artist Steve Moore (*Open Season*) and Chris Denk, and then re-worked some of the relationships and fine-tuned the details with the board artists," he recalls. "We also had some wonderful ad-lib work by Justin Long, so we would go back and add some of the fun moments back to our story.

We were constantly adding things even while it was in full production."

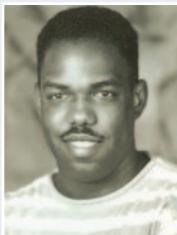
Because Crest Animation has been in the business since 1990 and has produced several features, including *Roadside Romeo*, *Dashavatar* and *Hanuman*, the production could rely on its existing pipelines. "This is their first mainstream release in the U.S. and it was also a big deal for Lionsgate, which is now venturing into the family film arena," explains Gluck. "That's why the project's energy level was amazing. People were very passionate about making the movie, and it was inspiring for us to be working with such a team of hardworking, talented people."

Since the wolves' names are Kate and Humphrey, it's easy to figure out that the creators were inspired by the famous 1951 Katharine Hepburn/Humphrey Bogart movie *The African Queen*, where the prim and proper Hepburn character gets stuck with a tough-as-nails Bogart. As Gluck tell us, "It's the classic relationship between an unlikely couple—there's always tension in those romantic comedies and that's what makes it fun. We wanted to get really strong performances. The trick was to give human-like performances while being true to the integrity of the way the animals move in nature and not make them anthropomorphic."

The film's overall look also owes a lot to LAIKA veteran Ovi Nedelcu (*Coraline*, *Jackie Chan Adventures*), who delivered a stylized variation on what we have come to expect from wolves in animated films. "We wanted to incorporate the natural design of the fur with the characters' personalities. Humphrey is an Omega wolf, who is scruffy, scraggly and streetwise, while Kate's fur is smooth, fine and feminine. Fortunately, we are now able to get a variety of fur depictions from the CG fur programs such as *Shave* and a



Ben Gluck



Anthony Bell

Haircut. You have to keep the hair short enough to allow for the parts where the fur intercepts with the body."

The film's co-director Anthony Bell says he also gravitated to the project because it had heart and was entertaining at the same time. "I think the story had a really important message," he notes. "I tend to pick and choose projects that really speak to me. *Alpha and Omega* tells a universal story about love. The fact that we were creating these amazing wolves in a 3-D world also provided us with a great challenge."

Bell, who is also working on the next Crest/Lionsgate movie *Norm of the North*, says he is especially proud of some of the more poignant moments in the film. "You can see how this adventure changes Humphrey at the end of their journey. He kind of opens up to Kate and says, 'Hey, I know everything is different, but we can make this work.'"

Just like Gluck, Bell is a huge fan of the classic Disney animated films and he mentions *The Jungle Book* as one of the pic's big influences. "It was very helpful to revisit that movie in terms of figuring out how to create the right feel and weight of a character. To make it flow like classic Disney, you have to really feel the emotions that motivate the actions while keeping the animals' point of view of the character. It's all about the characters' personality, instead of moving geometry."

The directors and their team relied on Maya technology to bring the wolves and their Canadian landscape to CG animated life. Bell says although he has had a lot of experience in 2D animation, what's most important to him



Capturing the Moment: According to the film's directors, the look of *Alpha and Omega* incorporated more naturalistic depiction of the wolves set against the Jasper National Park.



is the storytelling angle. "Whether it's 2D, Flash or CGI, it's all about making it fresh and exciting for the audience. Although I'm traditionally a 2D guy, what's fascinating for me in CG is that you can place the movie camera anywhere to tell an interesting story and guide the eyes of the audience to the important, focal parts."

The film's art director Donald Parks, who has also been working with exec producer Richard Rich for over three decades, tells us that he used real-world points of reference such as Jasper National Park to get all the details right. "This is the first full length CG-animated feature that I've worked on, and I really enjoyed telling the story from the wolves' standpoint. Painting nature is one of my favorite things, so I really enjoyed working on this movie. Our big challenge was not venturing too far into stylization and to be as naturalistic as possible. I believe we'll venture further more into stylization in our future Crest projects."

ney was the only game in town, but today, we are fortunate to be able to work at so many different places and tell all kinds of stories."

Gluck says he feels fortunate to be able to go from working on a dark post-apocalyptic movie like Shane Acker's 9 to a 3-D CG-animated romantic comedy about wolves. "It ultimately comes down to the fundamentals of telling a great story and allowing audiences to connect with the characters," he concludes. "What I love about animation is that we keep moving forward. We're seeing animated films exploring more sophisticated issues. We all need to take more risks and not worry about being like everyone else. Let's make our unique movie even if we don't have DreamWorks or Pixar's budgets. Let's just keep pushing the art form into more exciting territories." ■

Lionsgate releases *Alpha and Omega* in select theaters on September 17.

One Man's Best Friend

Paul and Sandra Fierlinger's animated adaptation of *My Dog Tulip* tells a poignant, personal tale through realistic and simple drawings and paperless TVPaint technology.

by Ramin Zahed

You've got to love indie animators Paul and Sandra Fierlinger. The talented husband-and-wife team have been creating award-win-

topher Plummer as the author, the late Lynn Redgrave as his sister and Isabella Rossellini as a sympathetic vet.

"It's funny how it all happened,"

says Fierlinger during a phone call from the Pennsylvania home he shares with Sandra. "We got a call out of nowhere from producers Howard Norman and Howard



ning hand-drawn projects such as the PBS projects *Drawn from Memory*, *Still Life with Animated Dogs* and *A Room Nearby* in the past couple of decades. In a world where it's common to chase after formulas that will reach the widest audience possible and target the cheapest common denominator, the Fierlingers stand out because of their devotion to personal, eccentric material that speaks to them as artists.

This month, New Yorker Films will release the latest feature by Fierlinger and his wife Sandra in select theaters in New York and Los Angeles. Based on the acclaimed 1956 memoir by the late British author J.R. Ackerley, *My Dog Tulip* tells the poignant tale of the author's 14-year friendship with his adopted German Shepherd. The 82-minute-long film, which was the official selection at last year's Toronto International Film Festival and also played at the Ottawa Animation Festival, boasts a stellar voice cast which includes Chris-

Kaminsky, who told us that they wanted to make an animated feature film with us. They said pick a well-known book and they'll supply the stars to voice the characters!

They'd never produced an animated project before, and we were recommended to them by a friend. So we decided to tackle *My Dog Tulip* because we had animated dogs before. We didn't want our film to be cutesy

like so many other films about dogs are. It's the kind of movie that people are either going to love or hate!"

Unlike most feature film animators who work with the major studios, Fier-



Paul and Sandra Fierlinger and their canine pal, Oscar.

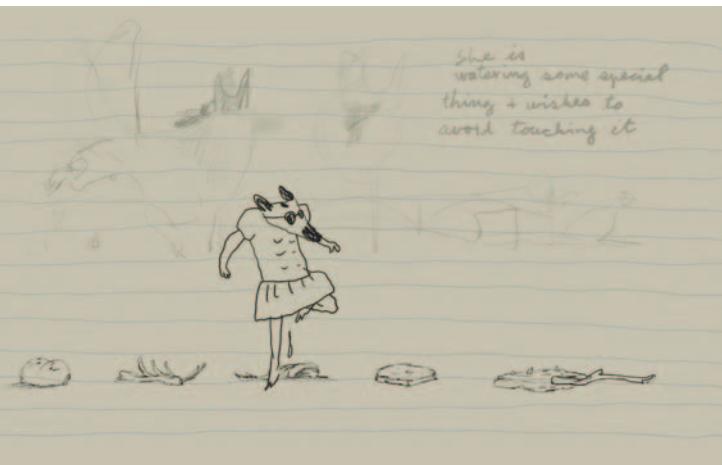
linger and his wife worked together from their home in a small Philadelphia suburb with an estimated budget of 1.3 million dollars—which included the big salaries of the film's major stars.

"It took us about two and half years to draw and paint and then several months for pre- and post-production," says the septuagenarian animator. "We put in about 12 to 16 hours every day. We live very hermetic, mundane lives with our two dogs, Gracie and Oscar."

Fierlinger is quick to point out that their version of Ackerley's memoir is the polar opposite of a Disney toon. "It's a very scatological book," he says. "It's all about doggie bodily functions and mating. Dogs are all about eating, pooping and humping! Our dog Gracie has enough German Shepherd in her so we were able to base a lot of our drawings on her."



The way Fierlinger and his wife approach each project is very similar to the way an author works on a book, he says. "You start with scene one and keep drawing until you're done with



the movie. Everything starts to fit in like the first easy pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. But I always get stuck at some point. I paint myself into a corner, because I never look too far ahead. That's when I call Sandra to the rescue. 'Look what's happened,' I tell her, and she has to help me out of the corner, which she usually does because she approaches the problem with a clean slate!"

The Fierlingers have been using TVPaint technology to create their animated films for the past 12 years. "I hated to work with cels because they were susceptible to dust scratches and flairs. I experimented with Xerox machines, but didn't like that either. TVPaint emulates tactile tools, just like brushes and

watercolors. Everything you see in *Tulip* was done with a Wacom tablet, but it looks hand-painted."

Fierlinger says working with paperless technology has saved him a lot of time. "I draw every second frame, which makes 12 original frames for each second of projection time, therefore that's 12 times 60 or 720 drawings per minute, which totals 58,320 drawings for the 81 minutes length of the movie. It's safe to say that

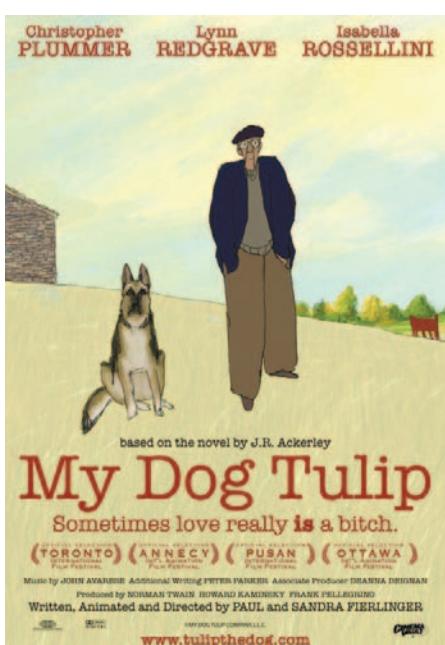
Sandra had to make about 600 individual background paintings."

Years before Fierlinger made his animated films for PBS, he established himself as an indie animation producer in Czechoslovakia, working for the acclaimed Kratky Film and creating numerous children's shorts for film and TV. In the 1970s, he formed AR&T Associates and



produced shorts for Sesame Street, including the popular Teeny Little Super Guys series. He even received an Oscar nomination for the short *It's So Nice to Have a Wolf Around the House* in 1980. Despite all the work it takes to create one of his animated movies, he says he's never been happier. "I made my first animated work when I was 12 and started to work professionally in 1958," he says with a smile. "But now that I'm 73, I find it even more rewarding to work from home, because you don't want to leave your house. You do what you love to do best: It's a wonderful way to enjoy old age—I've truly never been happier!" ■

New Yorker Films' *My Dog Tulip* began its national theatrical release in New York City on September 1 at Film Forum.



Fierlinger's Ideal World for Animators

"Do you dislike politicians? Then don't be like one of them yourself. Don't say and do things just to please the largest possible amount of people without believing for a minute what you've been saying. Don't search for clever formulas and don't try to memorize the *bon mots* others repeat: Be authentic, tell the truth, and above all, be honest to yourself. I would like everybody to never imitate something someone else has done already. If that would happen, everyone would be happy because no one would be in competition with anyone else. This requires that we all become elitists in pursuit of the truth until we discover an original way to express ourselves.

Then, I'd like something else to happen, which is that those who clearly don't fit into this archetype and even find my answer somewhat repulsive, would acknowledge this simple fact and continue their search for uniqueness in another discipline. Then there would be no mass art, no kitsch, no fraudulent stereotypes and no lack of homework for anyone of us left behind."

—As told to Paul's friend, animator Asaf Agranat.

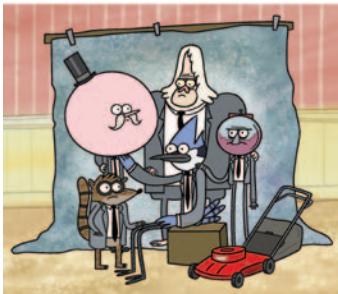


Fall TV Preview: 2010 Edition

The latest smattering of quirky, cute and just plain raunchy toons debuting in North America this season ... Of course, only the ones those secretive network cabbals want you to know about! Clear your schedules (or fire up the TiVo) for these awesome new animated offerings:



Cartoon Network



Regular Show

Synopsis: Mordecai, a six-foot-tall blue jay, and Rigby, a hyperactive raccoon, are the best of friends. They are also groundskeepers at a park owned by Pops, a humanoid-looking lollipop. Intrigued yet? While the insane hijinx they get up to to avoid their terribly dull jobs amuse Pops, they tend not to go over well with their boss Benson—who is an anthropomorphic gumball machine, obviously!

Production Company: Cartoon Network

Premiere Date: September 6, 2010 at 8:15 p.m.

Created By: J. G. Quintel

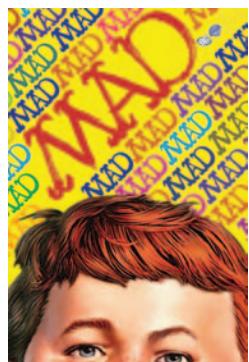
MAD

Synopsis: For almost 60 years, MAD Magazine has viciously poked fun at pop culture, and now that delightful irreverence is getting a fresh new animated take! A variety of animation styles take on spoofy mash-ups like CSI:Carly or The Fantastic Megan Fox, commercial parodies like Toys4Brats and classic MAD characters like Spy vs. Spy.

Production Company: Warner Bros. Animation

Premiere Date: September 6, 2010 at 8:30 p.m.

Created By: Sam Register (exec producer), Kevin Shinick and Mark Marek (producers)



Sym-Bionic Titan

Synopsis: Ilana, a princess; Lance, a rebellious but skilled soldier; and Octus, a bio-cybernetic robot, are three alien teens who crash-land on Earth while attempting to escape an evil General who has taken over their home planet, Galaluna. On their new planetary home, they must balance saving the Earth from inter-galactic attacks (and their own fumbles), battling the General's mutant minions, and most treacherously of all, trying to get through everyday life as average Earthly high schoolers!

Production Company: Cartoon Network

Premiere Date: September 17, 2010 at 8:00 p.m.

Created By: Genndy Tartakovsky, Bryan Andrews, Paul Rudish

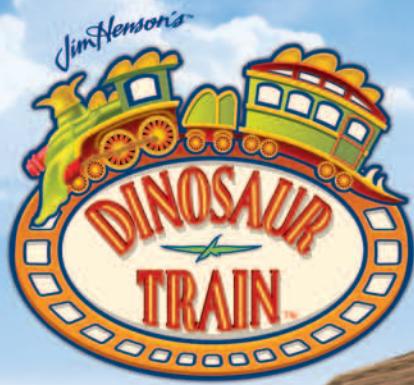
Firebreather

Synopsis: CN's first world premiere original CGI movie event delivers fierce action in the clash of two worlds where dragons roam the Earth and past secrets are exposed. At the center of it all, teenager Duncan struggles to find his place as half-Kaiju and half-human.

Premiere Date: Fall 2010

Created By: Phil Hester and Andy Kuhn (comic-book series), Peter Chung (director)





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Cartoon Network's [adult swim]

Mongo Wrestling Alliance

Synopsis: This body-slamming comedy follows the exploits of the Kleburkuh family, whose once great 200-year-old wrestling franchise, the Mongo Wrestling Alliance, is now the laughing stock of the universal pro-wrestling industry. The intimate ins and outs of the ring are revealed as the Kleburkuh brothers, Rusty and Bruno, form their own group to fight their way back to the top.

Premiere Date: November 2010

Created By: Tommy Blacha



Created By: Noah Z. Jones

Disney Channel

Fish Hooks

Synopsis: Milo, Bea and Oscar are three BFFs (best fish friends) living in a fish tank in Bud's Pet Shop. Together they experience the typical problems of most high school kids: friendship, dating, sports ... not to mention giant lobster attacks and field trips to the hamster cages. Thought up by children's book illustrator Noah Z. Jones, the series features a mix of digital and photo collage animation.

Production Company: Disney Television Animation

Premiere Date: September 24, 2010 at 9 p.m.



Disney XD



The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes

Synopsis: Join Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, The Incredible Hulk, Hawkeye, Ant-man/Giant Man, Wasp and Black Panther, a.k.a. the Avengers—a team assembled when no single hero's powers can save the world—as they take on the Marvel universe's most unbeatable foes. When a tidal wave of super villains is loosed from prison, only the Avengers can step up to defeat them.

Production Company: Marvel Animation

Created By: Marvel Animation



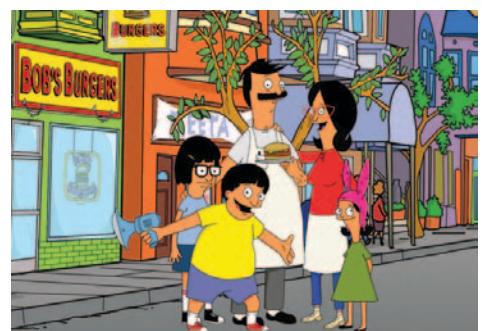
FOX

Bob's Burgers

Synopsis: Bob Belcher is a third-generation restaurateur with big ideas about burgers, but not many about customer service or business management. With the help of his begrudging wife and three kids—Tina, a hopeless romantic; Gene, an avid prankster and aspiring musician; and Louise, a hyperactive odd-duck who causes chaos in the kitchen, despite her enthusiasm—Bob gets through each day at the burger joint and tries to out-dish the pizzeria across the street.

Production Company: 20th Century Fox

Premiere Date: Fall/Winter 2010



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Nickelodeon

Planet Sheen

Synopsis: Hit CG kid genius Jimmy Neutron's pal gets his own animated go-round in this new series. Sheen Guevera Estevez is a hyperactive, attention-span-challenged kid who, after "borrowing" a rocket, crash lands on a Luddite planet called Zeenu. In addition to the planet's bizarre customs and strange creatures, Sheen must deal with a jealous villain; a lovestruck, 10-foot-tall princess with two faces; and a talking chimp who was blasted off by the '60s space program, who joins Sheen in his quest to return home.

Production Companies: O Entertainment for Nickelodeon

Premiere Date: Fall 2010

Created By: Steve Oedekerk and Keith Alcorn



T.U.F.F. Puppy

Synopsis: What happens when a gung-ho, dim-witted dog named Dudley Puppy finds himself accidentally thrust into the role of secret agent by the super-secret, crime-fighting organization, T.U.F.F. (Turbo Undercover Fighting Force)? He partners with Kitty Katswell, a feline super spy, kung-fu master and weapons expert. Naturally, they don't get along, but together they protect their hometown of Petropolis and the rest of the world against the evil animal organization, D.O.O.M. (Diabolical Order of Mayhem).

Production Company: Nickelodeon Animation Studios

Premiere Date: Fall 2010

Created By: Butch Hartman



PBS KIDS

The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!

Synopsis: Dr. Seuss' beloved, well accessorized feline comes to animated life (voiced by award-winning actor Martin Short) to guide his friends Sally and Nick on fun-filled adventures where they discover the intriguing scientific secrets of the natural world—with a little help from the Fish, Thing 1 and Thing 2!

Production Companies: Portfolio Entertainment, Collingwood O'Hare Productions

Premiere Date: September 6, 2010

Created By: Based on the books by Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss)



PBS KIDS GO!

Wild Kratts

Synopsis: Award-winning zoologists and kids' show creators the Kratt Brothers (Kratt's Creatures, Zoboomafoo) leap into a new animated reality for their latest venture, which finds them leading kids and their families on extraordinary animal-powered adventures, visiting wild animals in their little-seen habitats and showcasing key science concepts along the way.

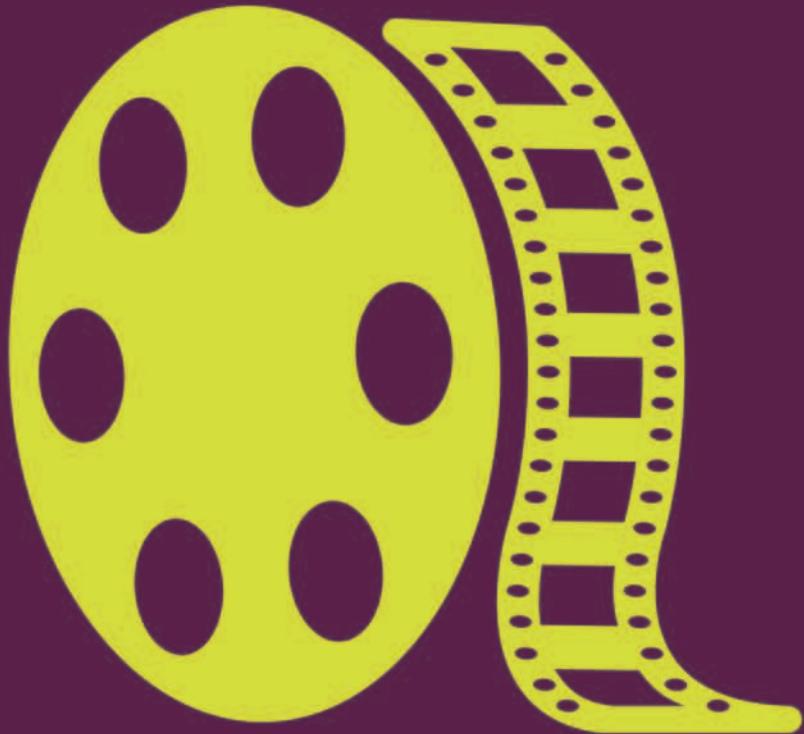
Production Company: 9 Story Entertainment

Premiere Date: January 3, 2011

Created By: Chris and Martin Kratt



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*Source: Global Animation Industry: Strategies, Trends and Opportunities -2009, Animation Age Ghetto -www.tvtropes.com.



Teletoon (Canada)

Total Drama World Tour

Synopsis: Bringing an international twist and a musical spin to this season, *Total Drama World Tour* continues the series' hilarious tradition of parodying the best moments of reality TV with some of the fan-favorite past contestants and a few exciting new faces. The participants get another chance at fame and fortune as they are flown to exotic locations all over the world to sing their way through larger-than-life elimination competitions, stomach curdling challenges, death-defying stunts, romances, friendships and ultimately, a chance at another million dollar grand prize.

Production Companies: TELETOON and Fresh TV

Premiere Date: September 9 at 8 p.m.

Skatoony

Synopsis: This side-splitting trivia quiz show, based on the U.K. series of the same name, puts real-life kids into a *Hollywood Squares* inspired situation alongside an assortment of beloved animated characters from the TELETOON universe. Host Chudd Chudders and his sidekick announcer The Earl guide the live-action contestants through the cartoon inflected mayhem.

Production Companies: TELETOON and marblemedia

Premiere Date: October 28 at 8:30 p.m.



Teletoon at Night

The Dating Guy

Synopsis: This comedic cocktail of dating, sex and friendship follows four 20-something friends—Mark, Woody, Sam and VJ—through their romantic, career and everyday struggles as they attempt to find love (or some kind of "happy ending"). From the ins and outs of dating a werewolf to the subtleties of seducing a virgin porn star, the series turns a no-holds-barred eclectic and comical eye on the world of dating.

Production Companies: TELETOON and marblemedia

Premiere Date: October 2010

YTV (Canada)

Sidekick

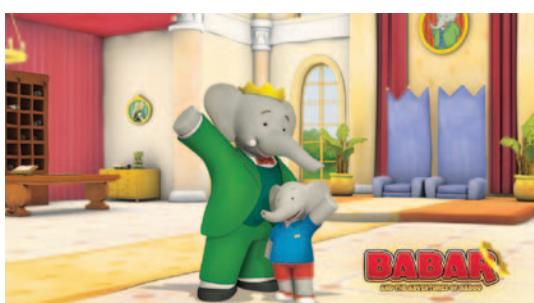
Synopsis: Eric Neddles is a young orphan who lives in Sidekick, a world populated by super heroes and villains ... and then there's the sidekicks, like Eric and his second string friends, who are always given the worst jobs and are most likely to be used as projectiles! On the day Eric was to become sidekick to the greatest super hero of all time, Maxum Man, Maxum went missing. Lest the world descend into panic, this rookie must cover for Maxum's absence.

Production Company: Nelvana Studio

Premiere Date: September 11 at 10:30 a.m. during the CRUNCH block



Babar and the Adventures of Badou



Synopsis: Eight-year-old Badou has an appetite for adventure ... and a tendency to get caught in some tricky situations, along with his colorful friends Chiku the monkey and Zawadi the zebra. Navigating the ups and downs of growing up in Celesteville's royal palace, Badou never forgets that his famous grandpa, King Babar, will always be there to offer guidance and support.

Production Companies: Nelvana Studio and TeamTO

Premiere Date: November 22 at 11 a.m. during the Playtime block ■

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Science Gets Seussical!

The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That! brings the timeless Dr. Seuss character to animated life while serving up some fun scientific lessons.

If you're still having nightmares about the obnoxious Mike Myers live-action version of *The Cat in the Hat*, we have some fantastic news! This month, PBS will premiere a wonderful, animated version of Dr. Seuss' (Theodor Geisel) evergreen preschool books that is bound to erase the memory of the 2003 movie. A co-venture between Canada's Portfolio Entertainment and U.K.'s Collingwood O'Hare Productions, the new 40-part show is titled *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!* and features the

served his own animated TV show, so she contacted the execs at Random House and began pursuing the project and putting the producers together.

One of key ingredients of the show is its educational component which encourages young children to get prepared for first-grade science curriculum in a fun, gentle manner. "I find myself constantly surprised by some of the things I've learned as a result of working on the show," says Stall. "For example, there's an episode where

but we've been able to produce very fluid and bouncy animation with the technology," she notes. "You can stretch and squash as much as you need to!"



Julie Stall

The production's team of designers used the original source material as their starting point for the show's visual style. "The books have a very limited color palette and we needed to have a richer, more vibrant look," explains Stall. "In addition, we also had to design a number of new characters and locations. We had to understand the Seuss style and then translate it to brand new characters. One of the new characters looked so Seussian that even the author's estate holders were shocked to find out that it wasn't in the original library!"

Meeting the approval of the Seuss estate and incorporating all the producing broadcast-

ers' notes took a lot of revisions and detail work, but Stall says that thanks to the hard work of the design, storyboard and animation teams, they were able to meet and surpass everyone's expectations. "From the start, our big challenge was being true to the book and keeping the quality as high as one would expect from a Dr. Seuss project," she notes. "I think we were also very lucky to secure our wonderful voice cast, especially Martin Short, who has brought so much to the part. His adlibs, interjections and catch phrases are just hysterical, and he always brings something organic to the show."

Stall says she believes that parents are going to really enjoy meeting this new incarnation of the Cat. "We don't allow any outrageous behavior—he's just a big fun kid himself and he's going to help the kids at home learn more about the world around them." In other words, you and the little ones can relax and watch with a big smile on your face: No scary Mike Myers shenanigans are allowed here! ■

The Bee's Knees: The new animated series based on the famous Dr. Seuss books teaches preschoolers about the natural world.



voice of Martin Short as the mischievous main character.

"We wanted to take this familiar character and build an ongoing series around him," says Julie Stall, the series producer at Portfolio. "We have the two kids Nick and Sally drive the show's plotlines. We also wanted to retain the Cat's sense of curiosity, silliness and over-the-top enthusiasm, but we wanted to contain him in a way that he wasn't scary and doesn't disturb the comfort level of the kids."

According to Stall, it was PBS senior director of children's programming Linda Simensky who was one of the early champions of the project. Simensky believed early on that the Cat de-

kids learn about how bees make honey, and I had no idea that bees actually do a special dance to show each other where the nectar is in the flower or that honey actually contains the spit from the bees mixed in with the nectar!"

Portfolio shares the Canadian animation work with Ottawa's PIP studio (Caillou, Cy-berchase), while London-based Collingwood O'Hare handles the leica reels, story editing, music composition, audio tracks and effects, under the direction of toon veteran Tony Collingwood (*The Secret Show*, *Gordon the Garden Gnome*). Stall says the animators use Flash technology to bring the Seussian world to life. "A lot of people can't believe that it's Flash,

The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That! joins the daily PBS KIDS lineup on Monday, September 6. It also airs on Corus' Treehouse channel in Canada.



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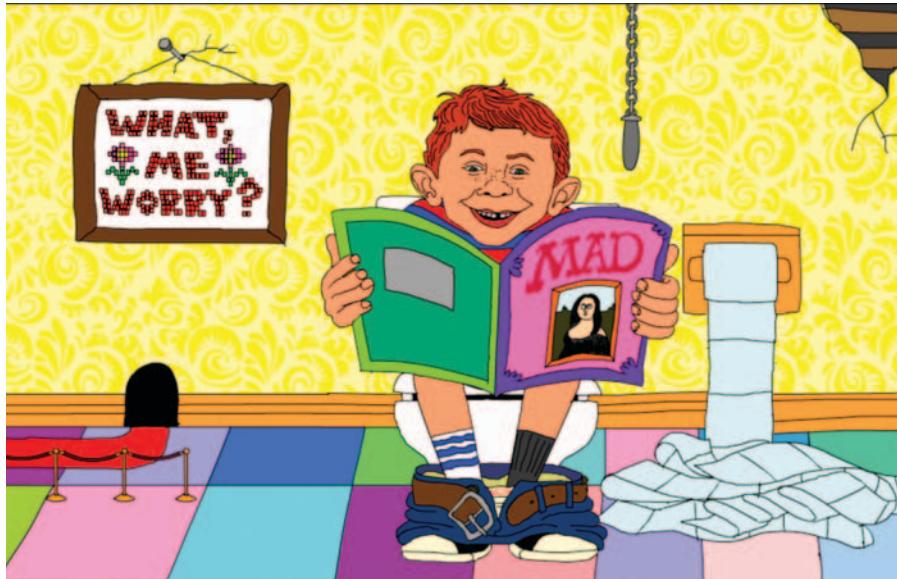
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Cartoon Network Goes MAD

Warner Bros. Animation brings Alfred E. Neuman and the satirizing sizzle of MAD to animated life with its new skit series. **by Mercedes Milligan**

Epitomizing pop-culture lampooning since 1952, MAD Magazine has delighted generations of adolescents (and plenty of adults who may not admit it) by poking fun at film, television, celebrities and any other phenomenon that needs to be taken down a peg. After spawning a hit live-action series, the comedy rag's richly punny humor is hitting the tooniverse, thanks to Warner Bros. Animation.

"I think it was inevitable. In fact, it might actually be one of the signs of the apocalypse," jokes producer and story editor Kevin Shinick, who has served as a writer and actor on gems like *Robot Chicken* and *Ugly Americans*. "Considering how pop culture crazy our society has

become, now seemed like the perfect time to move the spotlight back onto the mother of all comedy mags. Once that was decided, the idea of making it animated seemed obvious, since it would allow us to push boundaries and

recreate many of the iconic bits and characters MAD is known for."

Shinick points out that most animated comedy series on the air have very distinct, love-it-or-hate-it styles. Because of the variety of spoofs, bits and characters the show would incorporate, the studio decided to combine a variety of animation styles into "a virtual hub of cartoon chaos."

MAD is being helmed by Shinick and fellow producer Mark Marek, as well as executive producer and Warner's EVP for creative affairs Sam Register, who is currently toiling on several other new and upcoming WB toons including *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated* and *Young Justice*. The studio's SVP of series and alternative animation, Peter Girardi, serves as creative executive, bringing his experience from adult comedy fare *Minoriteam* and *Saul of the Mole Men* to bat. The show will incorporate work from a bevy of MAD Magazine's notable artists (in the vein of Sergio Aragonés) as well as some of the talented upstart animators behind kitschy [adult swim] favorites.

A Cartoon Collage

According to producer Mark Marek, who has cut his chops animating a variety of projects including *DJ & The Fro*, *Crank Yankers* and *Team Umizoomi*, the greatest challenge in crafting the





The Heart of MADness: Warner Bros. assembled a varied roster of studios and artists to create diverse new looks for MAD's lampooning skits, as well as bring back old favorites like

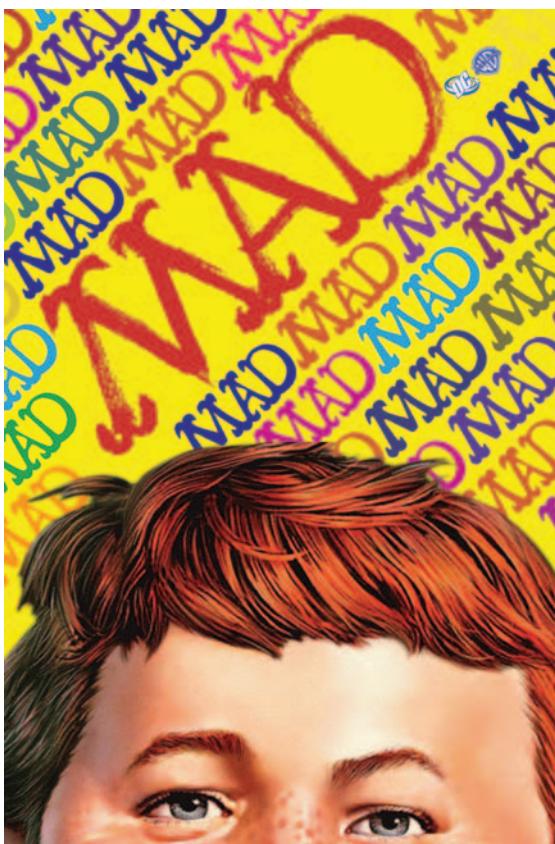
Alfred E. Neuman.

show's 26 ordered episodes is juggling the various studios charged with the different techniques required for each skit.

"We have roughly eight artists working in-house, and a floating stable of seven or eight outside studios involved," he explains. "Theoretically, the production time is two weeks per episode ... however, due to the nature of so many disparate animation pieces, approvals tend to stretch that time frame out a bit!" However, the toon veteran says that working with and mixing the various styles into a cohesive end product is his favorite aspect of molding this eclectic series.

As Shinick explains, "Just like a single issue of MAD Magazine features the different styles of Sergio Aragonés, Mort Drucker, Tom Richmond, Don Martin, Spy vs. Spy and an assortment of others, we're doing the same thing with the very same artists, while also adding new artists with their own distinct style."

Marek reveals that the series will incorporate techniques and technologies including Flash, After Effects, Maya, stop-motion, traditional cel and photo collage. Shinick has a simpler answer: "I use something called a 'Mark Marek.' It's a little slow, but man does it do a good job!"



Of course, working with so many different techniques can bring up the challenges that each presents. "Stop-motion is probably the most difficult style to work with, due to the unforgiving nature of the technique," Marek opines. "You essentially get one shot at rendering and shooting your models, therefore

it takes a bit more pre-planning before you get to that stage."

However, Marek is quick to say that despite the added difficulty, the stop-motion pieces are some of his favorite elements in the show. He is also a fan of the movie parodies ("Trans-bore-mores" and "The Fantastic Megan Fox" for example); "It's fun to work long-form—relatively speaking, in a show that features 10-second bits for the most part!"

For Shinick, the faux commercials strike a chord, and keep your

eyes peeled for his top pick parody "Grey's in Anime." But genius genre splicing doesn't always come easy! "Since most people discover MAD somewhere between the ages of eight and 15, we wanted to make that our target audience," he shares, "So at first I was like, 'What are these shows I have to parody? Who are these people?' Luckily we have a diverse writing and animating staff, so that our spectrum of pop culture references covers a wide area ... resulting in such craziness as 'CSICarly,' for example!"

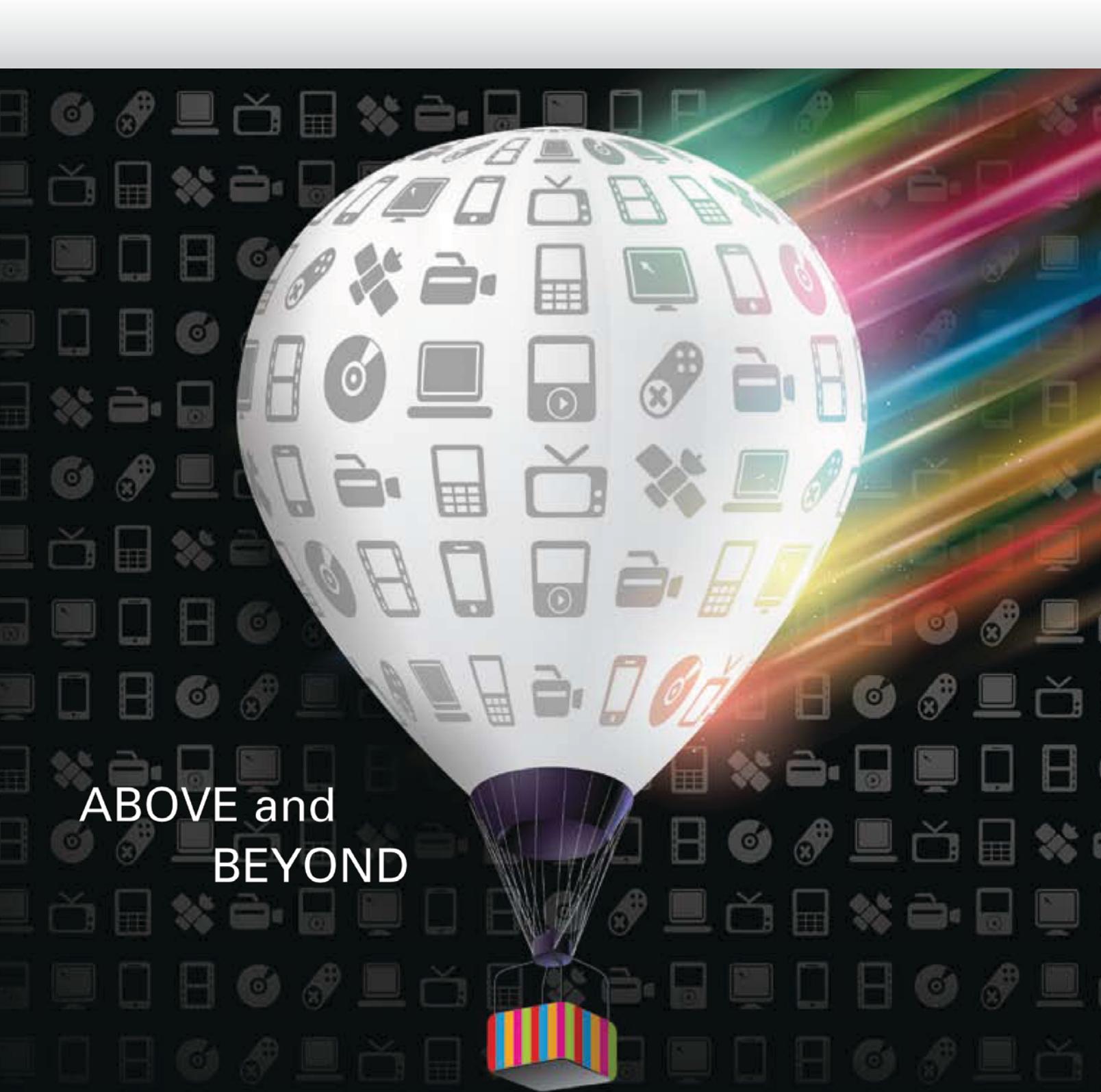
With so many animated comedies for audiences to choose from, MAD should be served well by its stand-out mix-n-match style and shameless sassing of our golden pop culture idols. Marek believes those who tune in will be impressed by the show's energy, edgy writing and visual variety. And Shinick concurs. "When you watch the show, I think it'll be hard not to appreciate the amount of time and energy that's gone into bringing it to life. But I really just want people to enjoy it for what MAD has always been."

Which is?

"Joyful stupidity."

...And who doesn't need more of that in their life? ■

Cartoon Network unleashes MAD
September 6 at 8:30 p.m.



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Kids' Toons Find a New Home

The Hub's president and CEO Margaret Loesch discusses the new Hasbro/Discovery venture's programming lineup and philosophy. **by Ramin Zahed**

Last year, when it was widely reported that Discovery Communications and Hasbro were launching a new kids' cable channel called The Hub, everyone in the business was curious about the kinds of shows the new outlet would be offering. This fall, after months of careful planning and spending about \$20 million to promote its content, The Hub is ready to unveil its eclectic line-up on October 10, when it will launch to about 60 million homes.

"Our goal is to appeal to a broad group of viewers and well over 50 percent of our content will be animated," says the joint venture's president and CEO Margaret Loesch. "We like to follow one working philosophy of animation and that is anything is possible—from the most elaborate CG animation to simpler more elementary types of material. We have an open-door policy to all kinds of animation."

Loesch, who has led numerous entertainment companies over the past few decades (including Fox Kids Network, Jim Henson TV, Hallmark Channel and The Hatchery) says she is looking forward to moving full force ahead with a full slate of

new programs. "We are offering 10 new animated series, and that's a lot given the fact that we're just starting out. We think this is the largest amount of new production for a kids network launch, because both Nick and Cartoon Network were already on the air for a while

Out of the approximate 1,339 episodes of new programming acquired by The Hub, the majority is animation, says Loesch during a phone interview from her Burbank-based offices.



Margaret Loesch

"I would say that the qualities we're looking for in our programs are playfulness and an adherence to the values of discovery and exploration, but first and foremost, we look for well-written stories. One other thing we're looking for is something that parents can share with their children—a sense of nostalgia, new versions of shows that kids' parents might

have grown up with—programs like *Fraggle Rock*, *My Little Pony* or *G.I. Joe*."

Loesch says she finds that this sense of familiarity with the brands has been resonating with many of The Hub's advertisers. "We walk in to the room

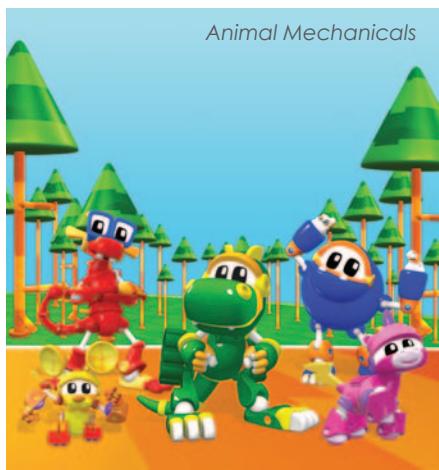
and show a clip from the new show *My Little Pony*, and there's an instant connection with those who used to watch the original show as kids, and now they can share this new version with their children." She has also noted that The Hub has been able to offer advertisers better prices than some of its competition—a factor that certainly adds up to the allure of the cabler in these financially challenging times.



before they went full steam ahead with new productions."



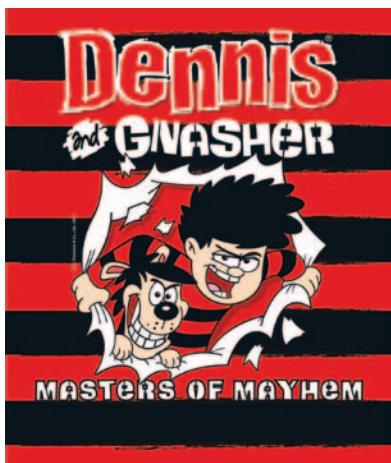
G.I. Joe Renegades



Animal Mechanicals



The Adventures of Chuck and Friends



Dennis and Gnasher

MASTERS OF MAYHEM

The Hub's new lineup will include *The 99* (a Teshkeel Media/Endemol Digital production), *Animal Mechanicals* (Halifax Films), *Cosmic Quantum Ray* (Moonscoop), *Deltora Quest* (Dentsu Entertainment), *Fraggle Rock* (The Henson Company), *Maryoku Yummy* (American Greetings/DQ Entertainment), *The WotWots* (Pukeko Pictures) and *Twisted Whiskers* (American Greetings/DQ/Moonscoop). Obviously, a healthy portion of the channel's programming will consist of Hasbro-branded shows such as *G.I. Joe Renegades*, *Pound Puppies* and *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. The cabler will also offer game shows based on Hasbro titles such as *Cranium*, *Bop-It*, *Connect 4* and *Clue*, as well as reruns of *Doogie Howser, M.D.* and *The Wonder Years* for older audiences.

According to previous reports, the children's network's day will be divided into a preschool block from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., kids afternoon/prime time from 1 to 6 p.m., family prime access from 6 to 7 p.m., and a family prime time from 7 to 11 p.m.

She also points out that sometimes there seems to be too much emphasis on design and new technologies instead of stories and great characters. "I am obviously a huge fan of animation—I loved it as girl and I love it as an adult," she adds. "I think the state of animation is probably healthier than it's ever been. I love experimentation, but I believe it has to come with great stories and character development. I see a lot of amazing designs—but sometimes, what I don't see enough of are clever character development and strong storytelling skills."

Loesch and her team are also on the lookout for properties that may not seem like the obvious candidates for a big U.S.-based kids network. "Some of the most interesting series we have are British shows such as *In the Night Garden* and *Dennis and Gnasher*," she adds. "This is the first incarnation of Dennis, and I believe it's the first time he's come to this country. We will also premiere *The WotWots*, a CG animated series created by Weta's Richard Taylor and Martin Boynton."

Of course, Loesch's years of experience in the kids' TV universe have taught her many important lessons that she's using every day on the new job. "I remember years ago when I was at Fox Kids, I bought an Australian children's puppet show and we decided to dub with American voices. Then two weeks after we started airing it, I happened to watch it from home and I realized that I had made a big mistake. When we took the Australian accents away, we also took the show's unique personality out of it! So that's why we are definitely not dubbing *Dennis and Gnasher* and hope the original accents work for our audiences."

Loesch says one of her favorite aspects of the job is putting together a team of people who will be the future leaders of the industry and who'll help creative talent flourish. "There are so many people with great ideas and so few doors open to them, so it's fun to make programming happen for those who don't necessarily have opportunities available to them." ■

To find out more about The Hub, visit www.hubworld.com.

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A Big, Big International Friendship

Canada's Breakthrough Entertainment and Brazil's 2Dlab join forces on the uplifting new preschool series, *My Big Big Friend*. **by Mercedes Milligan**

Spend 15 minutes with any preschool aged child, and you will quickly be reminded of the vastness of their imaginations. It is a special gift young kids are blessed with—the ability to turn a cardboard box into a submarine, or the neighbor's dog into a roving stegosaurus—and one that many in animation strive to hold on to throughout their adult lives.

That's why Breakthrough Entertainment's newest preschool offering should strike a chord with tykes and toon-heads alike. *My Big Big Friend* follows the adventures of a trio of youngsters: Yuri, Lili and Matt. Together they dream up new pals, places and problems which they solve with their brimming imaginations, learning lessons in friendship along the way.

"Our main focus is on empowering kids to be wildly imaginative and to get creative when solving a problem," says Breakthrough's head of distribution, Nat Abraham. "Through the exciting, and often very funny, adventures that our characters create and experience—which can range from a balloon ride in the sky to a tunnel through the Earth—

we're showing kids that when you imagine you can, sometimes, you really can!"

The 52 x 11 series is a coproduction with Rio-based studio 2Dlab. CEO and executive producer André Breitman explains that the concept for *My Big Big Friend* began as a short film about the relationship between a boy named Yuri and his massive imaginary friend, Golias.

"We imagined that tiny little four-year-old Yuri was in fact Golias' 'big big friend' just as much as Golias was Yuri's 'big big friend,'" he says. "This complementary notion of friendship is the key we wanted every kid to notice: That you have to be a friend to have a friend."

The show, which combines 2D cut-out and full animation techniques, is crafted entirely with Toon Boom software (another Canadian connection). "Having Toon Boom Harmony and Storyboard Pro in the same production made us very productive," Breitman enthuses. "We go directly to animatic and we are able to have our designs already done in layers and ready for animation."

As for Friend's whimsical, colorfully kid-friendly design, Breitman describes them as "in a word: Brazilian," and points out that the palette, designs, worlds and characters reflect the country's unique cultural mixture. Bringing the show's expansive world—which includes dozens of fantastical settings dreamt up by its young heroes—to life is a team of about 80 animators and artists, including 16 dedicated designers tasked with realizing the writers' efforts at making each episode as fresh and expansive as a child's daydream.

With the first season nearly wrapped, Breitman speaks positively about the international co-production experience. "For us in Brazil, we were lucky that a company like Breakthrough and channels like Treehouse, Discovery Kids Latin

America and TV Brasil came aboard and risked something that had not been tried before. For Canada, I think they found a hard-working and passionate partner with a great idea and that brought serious money to the table," he explains. "We are all great friends and have immense respect for each other ... and we hope to have many other shows together in the future!"

Breitman notes that the latest crop of series coming out of the country and modern financing models have put Brazil firmly on the animation map, a trend he hopes to see grow in the next few years. He believes with an expanded selection of animation schools in the country to increase the hiring pool, the Brazilian animation industry would continue to make its mark.

Going into the fall MIPCOM and MIP Junior markets in Cannes, Breakthrough's Abraham has a positive outlook on the kids' TV animation market as well. "The programming market in general has been recovering nicely, and with animation, the demand is getting stronger," he elaborates, "Children's buyers are looking for more character-driven stories with elements of discovery and learning." A niche *My Big Big Friend* fits into nicely!

Breitman believes that this charming new series has the right mixture of elements to make it a hit. "We never imagined how good this show would end up looking, or how amazing the scripts would be ... We definitely have a layer there for parents, so, even though it's a preschool show, it should be fun for parents as well."

"This show was made with a lot of love," the producer summarizes, "We want [kids] to have fun, and we want these characters to be their friends." Surely everyone could use friends like these! ■

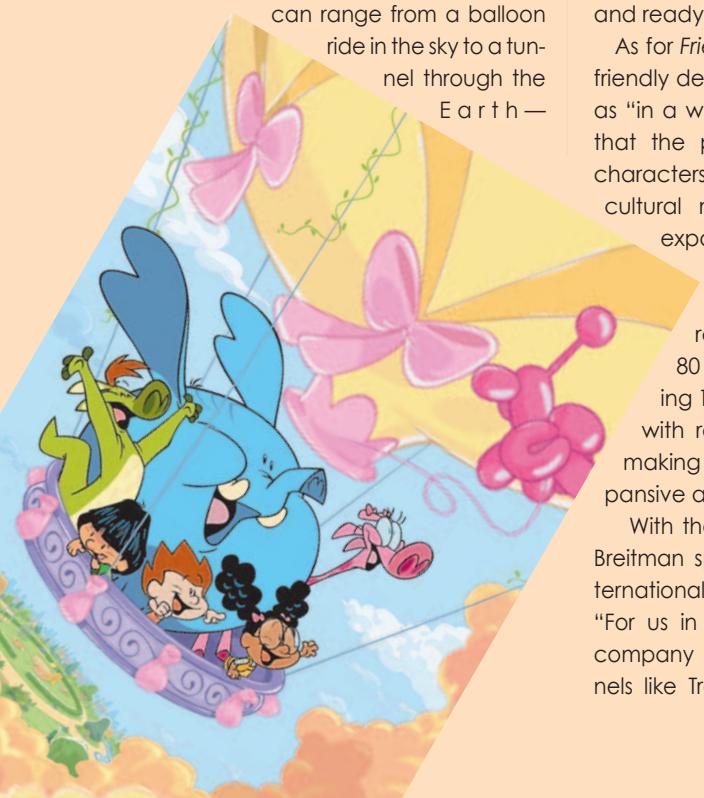


André Breitman



Nat Abraham

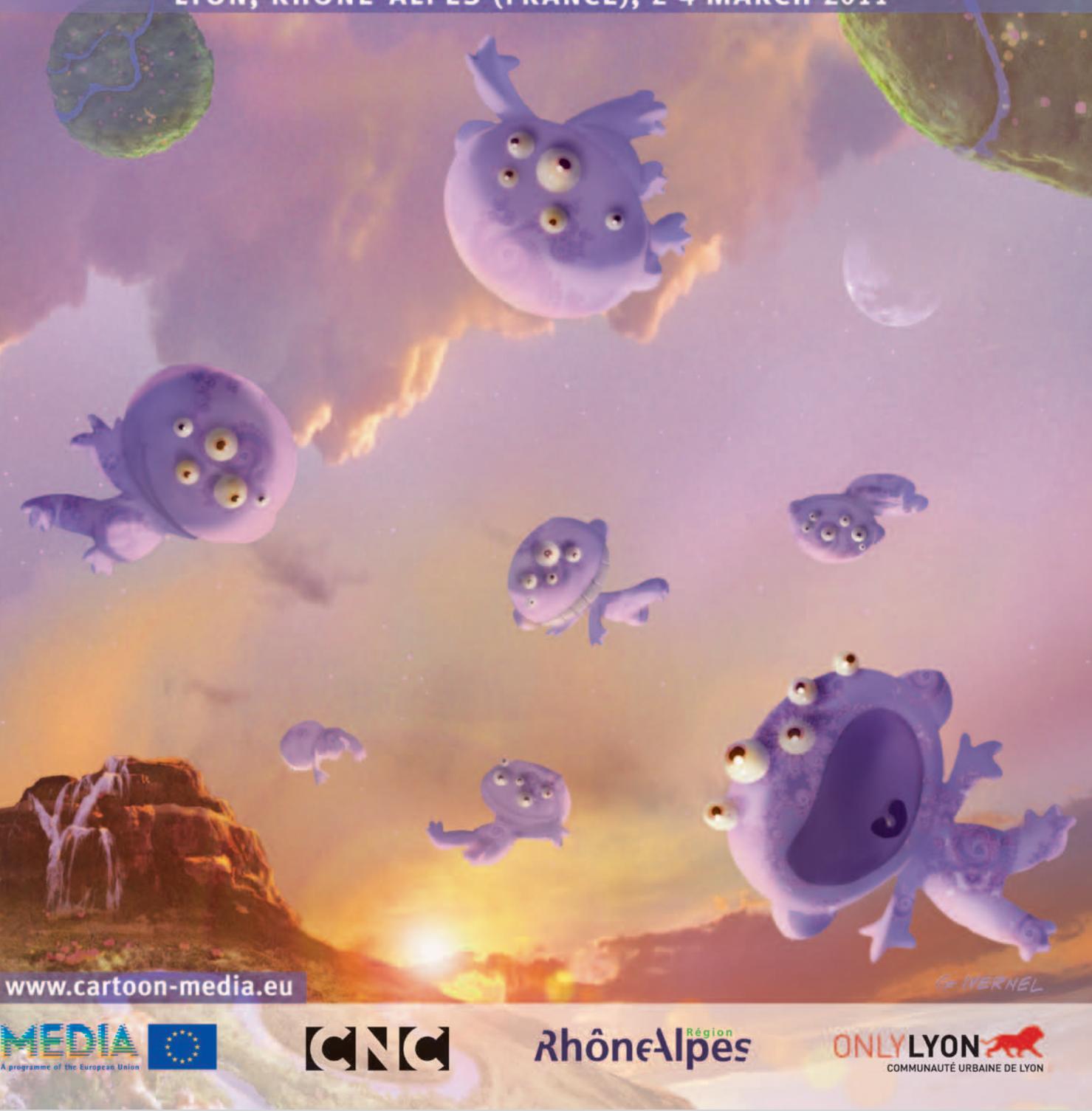
Breakthrough Entertainment will present *My Big Big Friend* at the MIPCOM market in Cannes, France this month. The series will make its North American premiere in Canada in 2011.



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Scaling the Heights

Disney Channel's new animated series *Fish Hooks* introduces viewers to a hilarious cast of characters with a backdrop of a great-looking pet shop.

When it comes to ideal settings for animated shows, you just can't go wrong with a pet store. But Noah Z. Jones' clever new series *Fish Hooks*, which premieres this month on Disney Channel, has a lot more going for it than just a fantastic setting. It also has a great cast of water-dwelling characters and a unique photo collage look.

"Our main fish characters are regular 2D cartoons, but the backgrounds, the props and the other characters outside the aquarium are real photo collages," says Jones. "I think the visuals are very striking, and they give the show a clumsy, indie feel." The team at Ottawa-based Mercury Filmworks helps Disney animate the show using the popular Toon Boom Harmony, a software that is based on a centralized database system, and can be used to create an eye-popping, cut-out style.

In addition to the great look and fun fish characters, the series also has a cool development history. Jones first came to the attention of the Disney team when Mike Moon, the studio's VP of animation, discovered his website. As Eric Coleman, senior VP of original series at Disney TV tells us, "We were all very impressed with his illus-

trations, so we contacted him to see if he could pitch us some ideas. We then made a short together and were all im-

mediately impressed with him and the tone of the project."

Coleman also brought in toon veteran Maxwell Atoms (*The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy*) as exec producer and Carl Greenblatt and Bill Reiss (*Chowder*) to direct the episodes, since this was Jones' first foray into the world of series animation. "It was a very smooth development process," says Coleman. "We started with the kernel of an idea, which was the notion of these fish tanks in

Justin Roiland) and the goldfish next door (Chelsea Staub). We fell in love with Jones' artwork, concept and sensibility, and then we developed the world that we could sustain with each episode."

Coleman and Jones came up with creative ways for the main characters to move around the pet store without having to use complicated land suits. The team also developed a wider cast of characters, which included the other fish in the



Noah Z. Jones



Eric Coleman

Water World: Disney Channel's great-looking series *Fish Hooks* is created by children's book illustrator Noah Z. Jones, developed by toon veterans Alex Hirsch and Bill Reiss and exec produced by Maxwell Atoms.



a pet store and the relationships among the character—the two brothers Milo and Oscar (voiced by Kyle Massey and

and friendships, but they also have rival schools—the Geckos, and the big city is continued on page 39



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Making a Splash: Kyle Massey (Milo), Chelsea Staub (Bea) and Justin Roiland provide the voices of the three main characters.

continued from page 37

Hamster Wood—which are all different areas of the pet store."

Jones says it has been especially moving to see the final results of the team's work after three years of close collaboration. "My favorite aspect of the show is the storyboard pitches," he says. "It's so much fun to experience the energy and creativity of our storyboard artists. It's also very exciting to review the backgrounds when we get the show back from Mercury Filmworks. It's really going to look like no other show on TV right now!"

As if having a big show debut on Disney Channel this fall wasn't enough to keep Jones busy, he has another animated project titled *Almost Naked Animals* being produced by Toronto's 9 Story Entertainment, which is slated to debut on Canada's YTV in February.

The talented 36-year-old illustrator/show creator says he can't wait to get everyone's reaction to his fish world once the show gets on the air. "I think *Phineas and Ferb* opened the door for new styles of animation and different kinds of humor than people were used to from Disney," he adds. "The characters on the show are so much fun, and we try hard to have the humor come out of the characters. Overall, I think it's a show that children and parents can watch together, because the humor isn't coming from a gross-out place, and the voices are also

naturally funny thanks to our great cast."

In case you were wondering, Jones didn't have much luck with fish when he was a kid. "I had a few, but they never stayed around for too long," he admits. "We do have hermit crabs at the studio and they're much easier to take care of." He is also eager for his three-year-old son and 10-month-old daughter to find out what their dad has been working on these past three years. "My son knows that I work on a show about fish because he has seen little bits and pieces. I'm sure he'll see a lot more when he gets older!"

Having been raised on a steady diet of Saturday morning toons like *Bugs Bunny*, *Underdog*, *Hong Kong Phooey* and Disney shorts, Jones is still charmed by the primitive look of some of the '70s era cartoons. "You look at those *Scooby-Doo* episodes, and you notice that nothing is moving except for the mouths, but they are still fun to watch."

That is in high contrast with the way television animation is expected to look these days. "Our biggest challenge is to keep the quality consistently high," says Jones. "We are holding ourselves up to some really high standards. We want this to be a show that we're all proud of creating." And that, dear readers, is certainly not a fish tale. ■

Fish Hooks will premiere on Disney Channel on Friday, September 24, at 9 p.m.

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Hungarian Haven

Billed as the first Cartoon Forum in a new E.U. country, the 21st edition of the noted European gathering showcases 62 new animated projects from the continent.

You know summer is officially over when many of the European animation producers and financiers pack their bags and their shiny new toons and head over to the annual Cartoon Forum event. (If you're a regular reader of this magazine, you know that the Forum is a platform created to boost the co-production and distribution of European TV animation.)

This year, the 21st edition of the fest is hosted by the picturesque Sopron resort in Hungary (September 14-17). According to the Forum organizers, over 110 entries were submitted from European countries, which signals a 20 percent rise from previous editions. French studios continue their dominance in the animation field, bringing in 20 of the 62 selected projects. The U.K. and Spain are next in line with seven and six series each. New E.U. countries such as Hungary, Poland, Croatia and Latvia also make a strong showing with 11 projects overall.

The Magyar Cartoon Forum is clocking up close to 360 hours of animation altogether, with an estimated total budget of 160 million euros (203 million U.S. dollars). Marc Vandeweyer, general director of Cartoon Forum, notes, "We're thrilled to have the event held in a country which has had a long animation tradition. Hungarian animation is renowned for its famous animators, whether exiled or not, and for its wealth of prizes gathered from around the world. For the first time, 11 of the projects presented at the Forum come from new E.U. countries. This is a remarkable breakthrough for Eastern Europe, and it illustrates both that the world is moving forward and that the large European market continues to thrive."

The over-reaching explosion of content for mobile platforms is



also reflected at the Forum, as an estimated 41 percent of the Forum projects are extending their reach beyond the small screen and planning ahead for mobile applications, Internet, videogames and iPads.

Of course, many of the toons selected at the Forum are presented by well-known studios such as Futurikon, Folimage, Gaumont Alphanim, Les Armateurs, Edebe, Gruppo Alcuni, Tele Images Kids, Studio 100, Screen 21, Dupuis, Studio Baestarts, Ellipsanime and Jam Media—many of which will take their development slate to the MIPCOM market in October.



Hector's Haunts (Les Armateurs/Les Films de la Perrine)

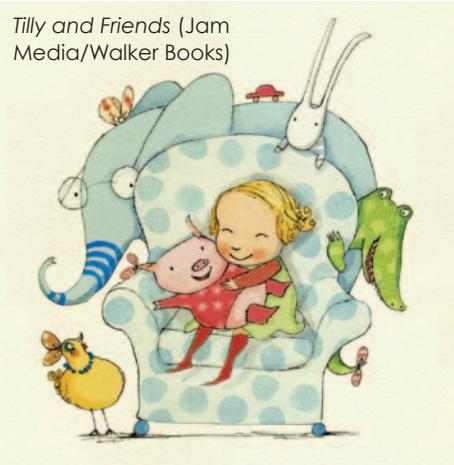


Yummy Yummy! In My Tummy (Folimages)

Also on the agenda is a special screening of the five finalists for the Cartoon D'Or award, which is given to animated shorts that have made the festival rounds in recent months. The 2010 contenders are Joseph Pierce for *A Family Portrait*, Kaspar Jancis for *Krokodill*, H5 for the Oscar-winning *Logorama*, Anita Killi for *Sinna Mann* and Johannes Nyholm for *The Tale of Little Puppetboy*.

Now all you need is Queen's hit song *Hungarian Rhapsody* playing in your head, and you'll be ready for one of the top toon events of the season. ■

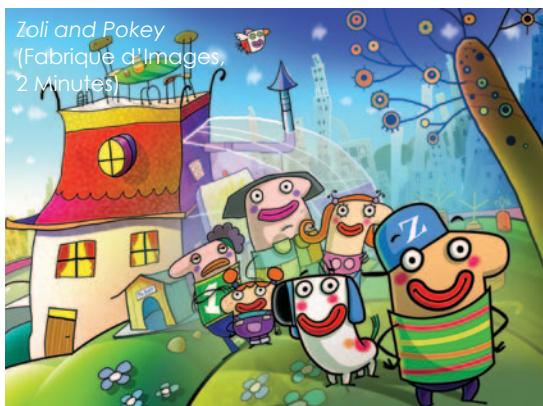
For more info, visit www.cartoon-media.be/forum.



Tilly and Friends (Jam Media/Walker Books)



The Treehouse Club (Sol 90 Audiovisual)



Zoli and Pokey (Fabrique d'Images, 2 Minutes)



Monster Animation Creates a Positive Role Model

A few month's ago, Seth MacFarlane ruffled a few feathers by getting some laughs out of a mentally disabled character on *Family Guy*. Some argued that although it wasn't quite the right way to feature a

handicapped character or a person with disabilities, at least it gave some exposure to a vastly under-represented minority.

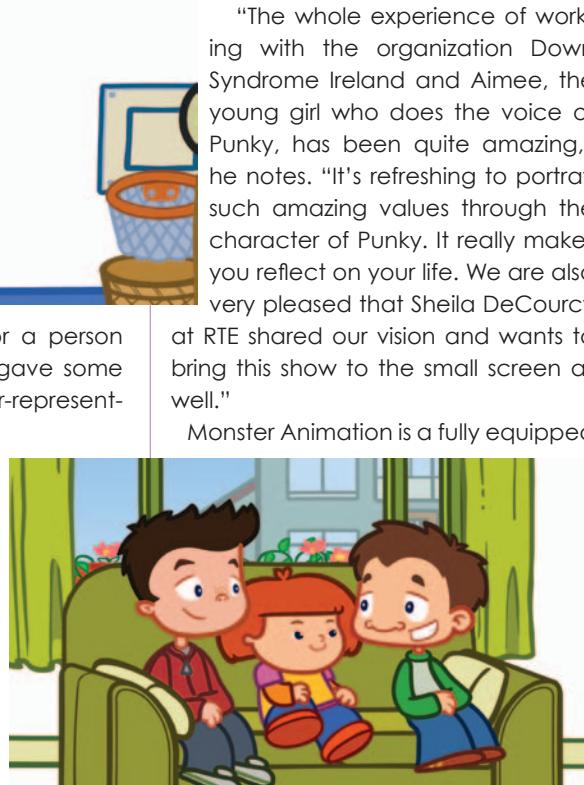
Indie Irish studio Monster Animation hopes to change all that with its new preschool series *Punkys*, which centers on a charming six-year-old girl with Down syndrome. "The show explores everyday life from Punky's perspective and how she deals with and solves scenarios that confront her," says Gerard O'Rourke, Monster Animation's producer. "It's a fun and entertaining preschool show which has a main character that has Down syndrome—and it's not a Down syndrome show."

The 20 X 7-minute 2D-animated series

is created by Lindsay Sedgwick and is scheduled to air on Ireland's RTE next spring. O'Rourke says one of the things that makes the show quite special is that a young actress with Down syndrome will provide the voice of Punky on the show.

"The whole experience of working with the organization Down Syndrome Ireland and Aimee, the young girl who does the voice of Punky, has been quite amazing," he notes. "It's refreshing to portray such amazing values through the character of Punky. It really makes you reflect on your life. We are also very pleased that Sheila DeCourcy at RTE shared our vision and wants to bring this show to the small screen as well."

Monster Animation is a fully equipped

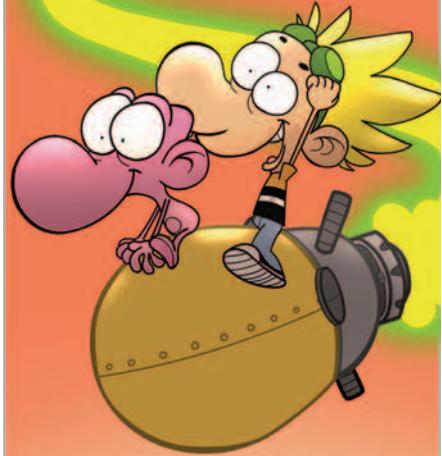


digital 2D studio based in Dublin, which has produced shows such as *Roobarb & Custard Too*, *Fluffy Gardens* and *Ballybraddan*. You can learn more about this wonderful indie shop and its forward-thinking projects online at www.monsteranimation.ie. ■

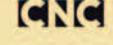
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Magic, Mayhem and Mad Science—Now on Disc!

Disney classics, DC heroes, Viking adventurers and pint-sized inventors populate the home entertainment shelves this month. *by Mercedes Milligan*

Beauty and the Beast Three-Disc Diamond Edition [Disney, \$39.99]

Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise's 1991 fairy tale (the first animated feature ever nominated for the Best Picture Oscar) reenters the home entertainment market with some high def sparkle this month. Disney fans of all ages can enjoy Belle's adventures in all new digitally restored picture and sound on Blu-ray or DVD with this combo pack, which has enough features to butter anyone's brioche.

Viewers can choose from three versions

of the film: the original theatrical release, a storyboard version or the Special Extended Edition featuring a new scene and musical number, "Human Again." Beaucoups de bonuses include a deleted scene, alternate opening, making-of featurettes Beyond Beauty and The Story Behind the Story, music vids starring Jordin Sparks and Celine Dion, on-disc games and interviews with Broadway production celebs as well as the songwriters behind the film's hit musical pieces (which you can enjoy in sing-along mode). Don't be surprised if after falling back in love with this classic you half expect your kitchen utensils to serenade you during dinner!

[Release date: October 5]

Superman/Batman: Apocalypse [Warner, \$19.98]

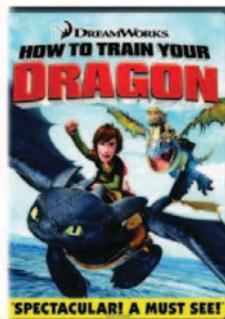
Director Lauren Montgomery and producer Bruce Timm are back at it with the much anticipated sequel to *Public Enemies*, based on Jeph Loeb's miniseries which explores the origins of Supergirl. When a strange spaceship splashes down in Gotham Harbor, Superman (Tim Daly)

and Batman (Kevin Conroy) encounter the newest Kryptonian on the block, Kara Zor-El (Summer Glau). But when Darkseid (Andre Braugher) catches wind of the powerful new extraterrestrial in town, he kidnaps her and places her under his control, pitting Batman and Superman against a foe who can match the Man of Steel blow for blow. The action-packed toon is also available on Blu-ray (\$29.99). Talk about girl power! [Release date: September 28]



How to Train Your Dragon [DreamWorks, \$29.99]

For a guaranteed good time, grab the nearest scaly critter and pop in DreamWorks' high flying 3-D CG adventure! Based on the novels by Cressida Cowell, Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois' highly praised fantasy romp follows a young Viking named Hiccup (Jay Baruchel) as



he befriends and tames a not-so-fearsome dragon named Toothless, much to his chieftain father's displeasure and the confusion of his dragon-slaying tribe. This beautifully crafted tale of acceptance and friendship can also be captured in a Blu-ray/DVD combo pack for \$39.99.

[Release date: October 15]

The Black Cauldron: 25th Anniversary Special [Disney, \$19.99]

It's hard to believe it's been 25 years since the film that almost dashed the

Mouse House's feature animation efforts hit theaters, but there you have it! Ted Berman and Richard Rich's take on Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain* series tells the story of a young pigkeeper with dreams of becoming a great warrior. When an oracular pig is kidnapped by the evil Horned King, he gets to test his mettle by joining forces with a colorful cast of characters on a quest to rescue the pig and put a stop to the Horned King's plot to use The Black Cauldron to take over the land.



Magical extras like a deleted scene, behind-the-scenes art and photo gallery, original trailer and on-disc games round off the celebratory release. Talking pig not included.

[Release date: September 14]

Dexter's Laboratory Season One [Cartoon Network, \$24.98]

At long last, cartoon legend Genndy Tartakovsky's squat, scheming, red haired, ambiguously accented young genius makes his DVD debut! If you need a little extra doom, gloom and things that go "boom" in your life, be sure to pick up the first two-disc set, which collects all 13 two-parter episodes from the premiere season spanning 1996-97. A true CN fan favorite, the series features the combined powers of toon titans Tartakovsky, Craig McCracken and Seth McFarlane, among many others,



and holds up supremely well after 14 years. Just don't let your destructive little sister get her hands on it!

[Release date: October 12] ■

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An Enchanting Encounter

Director Bradley Raymond and producer Helen Kalafatic share the magic of Tinker Bell's third solo flight on DVD.

by Ramin Zahed

It's no secret that young girls all over the world seem to have a never-ending fascination with Tinker Bell. The first two CG-animated DVD movies about Peter Pan's little friend proved so popular that the team at Disney-Toon Studios knew they had to deliver another top-notch solo adventure for the diminutive fairy. Titled *Tinker Bell and the Great Fairy Rescue*, this new charming movie takes place before our heroine even met Wendy and the Lost Boys and focuses on a special bond she develops with a nine-year-old British girl named Lizzy.

The film's director, Bradley Raymond, who also helmed the first Tinker Bell adventure, has been thinking about this particular storyline for a long time. "This concept for this movie has been in my head since when I first saw *Peter Pan*," he explains. "I love the idea of Wendy telling these fantastic stories to her brother, which turn out to be true. The whole idea of Tink meeting her first human is a dream come true for me; I've had the most fun working on a project because I always wanted to tell that story."

He says Lizzy is a lot like the film's target audience because she truly believes in the fairy world. "When I was a kid, it seemed like such a wonderful

idea to think about a magical creature like Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy visiting our house. It's the same for Lizzy, because one day Tinker Bell inadvertently gets caught in a fairy house that she has built, so she takes her home and they become friends."

Raymond and his team began work on this movie almost three years ago, when the first two features were also in production. He pitched the story to Disney chief creative officer John Lasseter, who contributed his own ideas to the story. "We worked from a great script by Bob Hilgenberg and Rob Muir and an incredible storyboard team, and together we'd write and storyboard

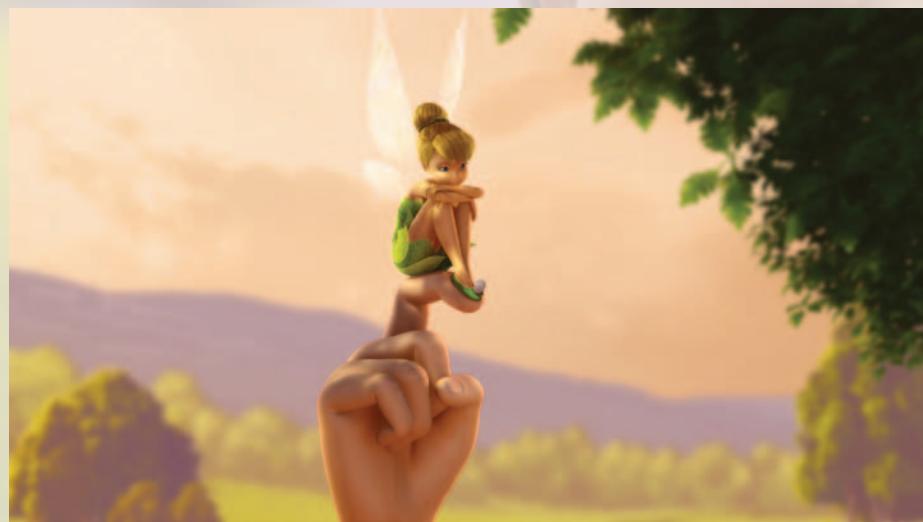
at the same time. We'd get the whole thing up in storyboard form, and from there, we could see what was working and what wasn't and we'd fine-tune everything in the pipeline."

The Disney team in Burbank worked with a 200-member crew at Indian studio Prana to produce the animation, which was done in Maya. "Our animation supervisor Sheryl Sackett worked closely with the team in India and she deserves a huge part of the credit," says Raymond.

The pic's producer, Helen Kalafatic, who has worked on numerous animated shows such as *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, also adds, "We are always striving to achieve the highest quality of animation, so there's a conscious effort to improve with each movie. Everyone wanted to really make the best film possible, so the whole crew had this great sense of pride, and I think you can really sense that when you see the finished project."

Both Raymond and Kalafatic also praise the crucial involvement of Lasseter with the whole project. "John really was a great mentor who saw us through the whole process," say the director. "He actually helped create the franchise and it was his idea to focus on the world of the fairies. He brings in the Pixar experience. Everyone watches the screenings as a group and is welcome to jump in and give their opinion on how to make the movie better. That's why we see all these great movies coming out of Pixar."

According to Raymond, Lasseter





Helen Kalafatic



Brad Raymond

was a key influence in making the world of the fairies relatable to the audience. "He talked about ways to make the fairies' clothing created out of natural elements, like rose petals, or having the fairies use acorns as wheels for their vehicles," he recalls. "The ideas to make Fairytown have all these contraptions made out of common natural objects by the fairies all came from him."

Seasonal settings have played key roles in the previous movies—the first *Tinker Bell* feature was set in spring while the second had a fall backdrop—and the third outing takes place in midsummer. However, one of the main design elements of *The Great Fairy Rescue* takes its cue from the fact that much of the action takes place in Lizzy's home in London. "In the first two movies, we were in the mainland for most of the movie, so the style was reminiscent of Pixie Hollow in Neverland, which was designed by the great Mary Blair," notes Raymond. "For this movie, we wanted to make it more realistic because once we're in Lizzy's world, it's in line with Wendy's original environment in London."

Adding to the realistic elements is award-winning British thespian Michael Sheen (*The Queen*, *That Special Relationship*) who provides the voice of Lizzy's father, a man of science who doesn't believe in fairies. "Live-action actors are



used to acting with their eyes and their faces, but Michael completely nailed it as a voice actor," says Raymond. "He also has a daughter who builds fairy houses in her backyard, so that was a great reference for him. We were also very lucky to introduce the young actress Lauren Mote as the voice of Lizzy: She has genuine star quality, and you can really get that sense of wonder in her voice."

The project also brought back the talented Mae Whitman as the voice of Tinker Bell, as well as Kristin Chenoweth (Rosetta), Raven-Symone (Iridessa), Pamela Adlon (Vidia), Jesse McCartney (Terence) and Lucy Liu (Silvermist). Joel McNeely, who composed the score for the previous two movies, also delivered another soaring soundtrack for *The Great Fairy Rescue*.

Grounded in the Real World

In terms of character design, Lizzy and her father look more realistic than Tink and the other fairies. While all the other fairies have design elements that echo Tinker

Bell, Lizzy and her father are more grounded in reality. The scale difference between them and the smaller magical creatures also helps viewers see the human world from the fairies' point of view.

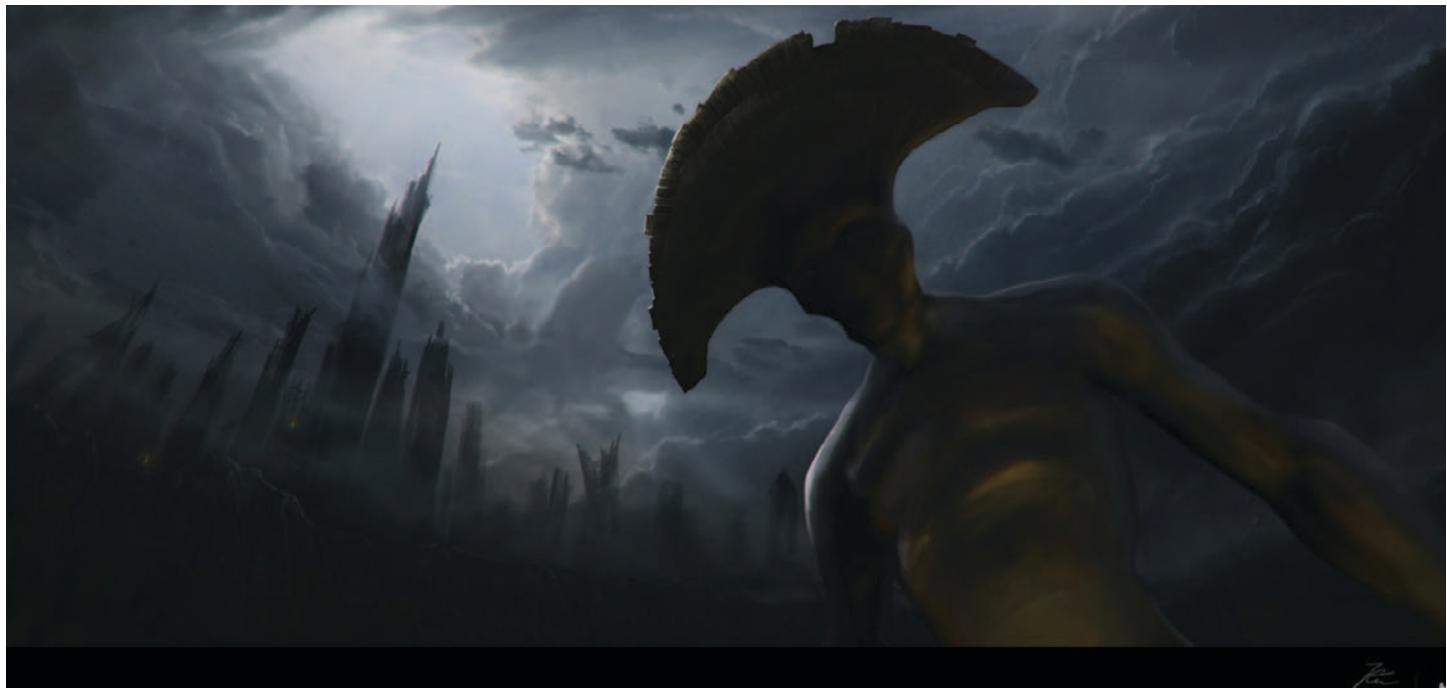
"Our biggest challenge was making their world believable," adds Raymond. "Our goal was to make Lizzy's performances believable, so that our audience could experience this story through her eyes. In fact, my favorite sequence in the movie takes place after Lizzy finds out that she has a real fairy in her house and she brings Tinker Bell back to her room. Tink is a little bit afraid because she's suddenly a prisoner in a way. The moment they finally come together and shake hands ... that's the wish fulfillment moment of the story and the real heart of the movie for me."

Raymond and Kalafatic both say that they feel blessed that they got to work with one of the best-loved and most relatable characters in animation history. "Tinker Bell has so many facets to her personality," suggests Raymond. "One of the most memorable moments in Walt Disney's classic *Peter Pan* movie [1953] is when she gets angry and turns red. There are so many stories that could be told with such a multi-dimensional character."

With a little luck and some pixie dust, we'll be seeing several more chapters in the charming fairy's life come to animated life in the next few years. ■

Disney's *Tinker Bell and the Great Fairy Rescue* will be available on DVD [\$29.99] and Blu-ray/DVD Combo Pack [\$39.99] on September 21, following a brief theatrical run at the El Capitan Theater in Hollywood.





A Tale of Two Demons

Shane Acker's latest project makes the grade with Gnomon students. **by Ellen Wolff**

When Shane Acker won the 2004 Student Academy Award for his animated short 9, his achievement reflected four and a half years of collaboration with his fellow students at UCLA's Animation Workshop. Of course, Acker went on to expand the post-apocalyptic world of 9 into a feature with producer Tim Burton. Now Acker has returned to working with students. This time, the students are from the Gnomon School of Visual Effects, and this latest short is another Acker original, *Plus Minus*.

"It's the story of two demons that are biding their time over the plains of hell," remarks Acker, whose easy-going manner belies his penchant for dark stories. "One demon doesn't have eyes and the other doesn't have a mouth, so each is missing a piece that's vital for communication. You get a sense that they've been there for centuries. Then one demon decides that he has a piece to complete the other demon, but of course, he has no way of explaining that. So it's a tragic tale of miscommunication that ends in

catastrophic results."

Like the short version of 9, *Plus Minus* unfolds without dialogue, and Acker is relying on Gnomon students to bring it to life. The idea of creating an animated short at Gnomon had been percolating for a while in conversations between Acker and Alex Alvarez, the school's founder and director. But to make this production a reality, the school established Gnomon Studios at its Hollywood headquarters, and modeled the facility like a modern visual effects shop.

"We have a space with 12 workstations allocated to the project," Alvarez explains. "For Shane's project we created a separate location, network and computers. Students apply to be part of the project and get class credit. These are upper term students. We have an eight-term program, so students in terms five and up are allowed to apply every term. Shane interviews those who apply, and selects them based on the skills that are needed for the production at that point."

Acker himself is spending four days a

week at Gnomon working with the students. "I came with some initial sketches and then actually started boarding here," he recalls. "The students participated from the inception and they were instrumental in helping to shape the ideas. I love the collaborative nature of animation, and there's something so fresh about young minds.

They're learning tools that they've applied in class but they haven't put them to a production test before, so I think it's interesting for them."

Gnomon's student crew is using Autodesk Maya, mental images' mental ray and Pixologic's ZBrush in its toolkit, which Acker notes, "Is a new pipeline for me. I had never used ZBrush before, so I'm relying on the students to teach me. We used it for a lot of our early concept designs as well as for the high-res detailing of our characters, which we'd then bring into Maya. One of our characters is more or less 'mummified in money,' so it's been a real challenge!"

"When I was doing the feature film of 9 I kind of got away from the tools,"



Shane Acker



Alex Alvarez

Acker admits. "The landscape has changed in the last four years, so it's been interesting to get back in the trenches. The students here are learning the newest tools so they're ahead of the curve. But that comes with its own complications. You have to learn how to bend the tools to your will. What makes this interesting is that you put a challenge out there and then everyone has to come together and figure out how to solve it. There's nothing right 'out of the box' that allows you to pull it off. Everyone just pushes forward and the best idea usually wins out and becomes our methodology. It's truly independent filmmaking."

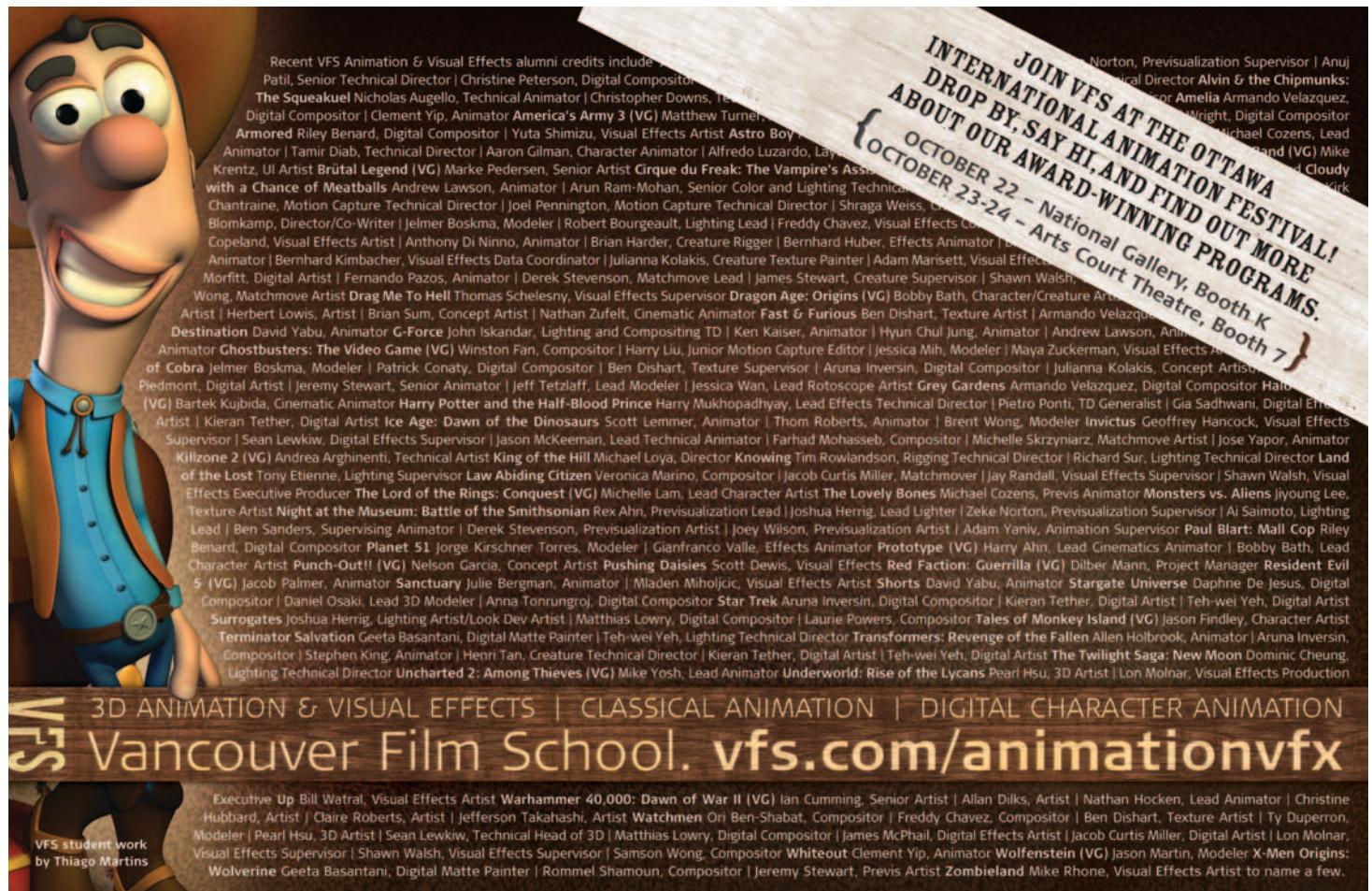
Another challenge of using a student crew is that the participants change with each 10-week term. *Plus Minus* commenced at Gnomon in the autumn of '09 and several participants have come and gone. As Alvarez notes, "You get a student who's a really talented rigger but then three months later they graduate and you

have to refill that position with a new student who has to get up to speed. Knowledge needs to be transferred from one person to another, so it complicates things a little bit."

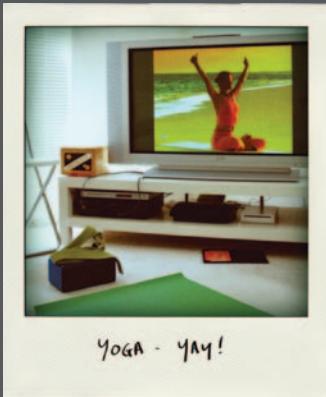
Acker, who holds a master's degree in architecture as well as animation, likens the process to building a medieval cathedral. "Those took hundreds of years. The father would start and the son would finish. A lot of our students aren't going to be here when

Plus Minus gets finished. But anything that they do we'll make available for their demo reels. Some graduates who have this on their resumés have gone for job interviews where a large part of their interview was about this project. So employers seem to be interested. It'll be exciting to see where this will go." ■

Ellen Wolff is a Santa Barbara-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, animation and education.



This month, we caught up with award-winning story artist **Elizabeth Ito**, who is currently working at Sony Pictures Animation. In addition to working on animated projects at Cartoon Network, Disney TV, DreamWorks, Fox, Film Roman, Imagi, Nickelodeon and Starz (including *Adventure Time*, *Phineas and Ferb* and *Astro Boy*) she is also the creator of the popular vinyl toy called Mister Monster. "The first job I ever told anyone I wanted was to make children's books, which is pretty close to where I ended up!" says the talented artist. You can find out more about her at www.kikutowne.com.



I try to exercise every day. Maybe putting a photo of it in here will make me better about it...



I have the brightest backpack possible, so on the days when I ride my bike, people can see me a mile away. I think people can probably see it from space.



I commute from Pasadena to Culver City. Sometimes I drive, sometimes I bike and take the metro. On this particular day, I drove. It's L.A., and there's traffic all the time. Big surprise...



This is the animation building at Sony. We make cartoon movies in here.



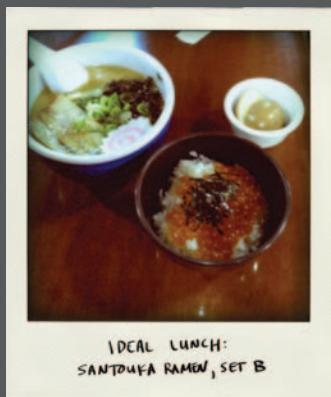
A standee for *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* that's up in the lobby of the building.



This is my desk. I do all my storyboard drawings on the Cintiq. Sometimes when I'm thumbnailing, I still use real paper ... but I've really come to love working digitally.



This is a bulletin board full of Ronald Searle animals. Reference and inspiration for all the story artists.



Sometimes when there's enough time, I go to the Mitsuwa market food court in West L.A., and this is what I usually order for lunch when I go there.



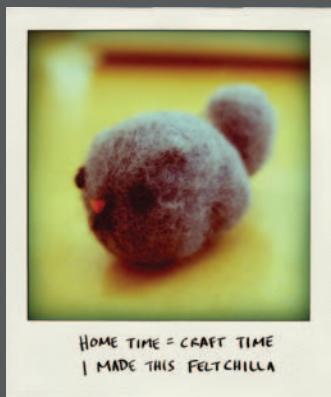
I made this ginormous cat for Hello Kitty's 35th anniversary/art show. It was fun driving him to the show. Now he always hangs out in my office.



The sun is setting over Pasadena.



Kevin Dart, my fiancé, making dinner. Hands off, ladies.



I've been doing a lot of felting lately, I made a chinchilla, and named him Feltchilla.



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